ies *of* Action Everywhere

No man needs better...
Style...Comfort...Fit

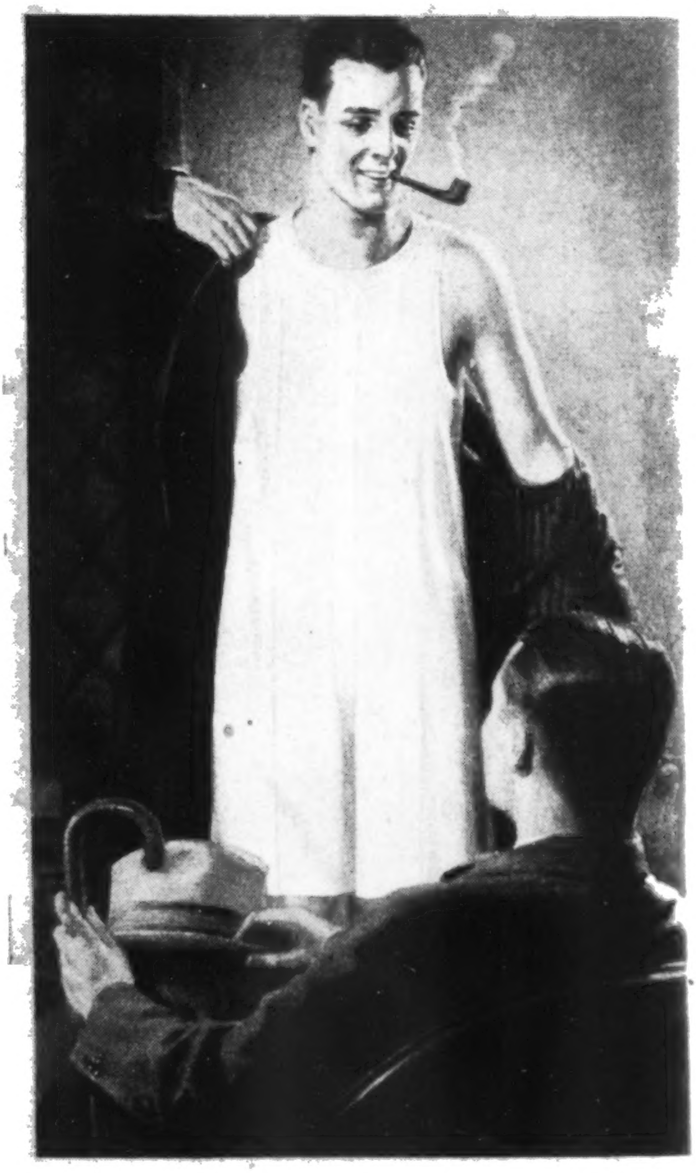
HERE is the finest Union Suit you can buy...and all it costs is ONE DOLLAR! But be sure you ask for Topkis. For in Topkis you get the biggest Dollar's worth of Underwear value.

Millions of men buying millions of Suits have made it possible to give you the fine, durable weaves—the big, roomy garments—and that stylish, careful tailoring, which make Dollar Topkis the outstanding Underwear of the nation.

Fine, durable fabrics—plain or fancy weaves. Men's Union Suits $1.00. Shirts and Drawers 75c each. Boys' Union Suits 50c and 75c. Children's Waist Union Suits 50c and 75c. Misses' Bloomer Union Suits, 50c and 75c.

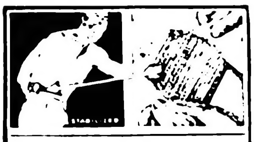
Topkis Togs—Our new line of athletic shorts called Topkis Togs come in white and assorted combinations, tailored the careful Topkis way.

TOPKIS BROTHERS CO.
Wilmington ▴ Delaware
General Sales Office
93 Worth Street at Broadway, New York



One Dollar

TOPKIS



Bend...reach...twist...stretch! The Topkis Stabilizer gives you unlimited freedom. Launders perfectly. 100% fabric stretch—no rubber—that's the secret!

ATHLETIC UNDERWEAR

AT THE TOP OF UNDERWEAR FAME STANDS THE TOPKIS NAME

May, 1928
Vol. LVIII No. 5

Everybody's

WILLIAM CORCORAN
Editor

CONTENTS

THREE NOVELETTES

Gold Bars — *Ared White* — 1
The Army, and the way to promotion and pay

North of Nowhere — *Hulbert Footner* — 40
On the battleground of the free traders

Command — *Frank H. Shaw* — 138
Of the wrathy sea and the majesty of one man's courage

SEVEN SHORT STORIES

The Desert Bell — *Ernest Douglas* — 20
A thrilling and realistic tale of the waste places

The Light On Little Hope — *Captain Dingle* — 33
Storm, and a small boat braves the wintry ocean

Brains — *A. A. Proctor* — 73
The prize ring, and the crowning of a champion

The Highgraders — *Charles Alma Byers* — 85
A Western story of a gold mine and a desperate gang

Rio Red — *Raoul F. Whitfield* — 121
The border, and a bandit of the air

The Price of the Tusks — *Reginald Campbell* — 131
Of the jungle and a brown man's honor

Guns Across the Table — *Parker Kerby* — 163
A hard-boiled and convincing story of the modern gunman

ONE SERIAL

The Secret Lagoon Part III — *Basil Carey* — 94
A romance of the glamorous South Seas

Everybody's Meeting Place — 173

The News of Next Month — 176

Cover Painting by Duncan McMillan

Headings by Joseph Easley

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE RIDGWAY COMPANY
OSEPH A. MOORE, President LEVIN RANK, Secy. & Treas.
SPRING AND MACDOUGAL STREETS, NEW YORK, N. Y., U. S. A.

Entered as Second-Class Matter, August 16, 1899, at the Post-Office, New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Chicago, nois. Yearly subscription, $2.50, in advance. Single copy, twenty-five cents. Foreign postage, $1.00 additional. No extra postage for Canada.

EVERYBODY'S takes all reasonable precautions for handling manuscripts submitted, but assumes no responsibility for their safety.
Copyright, 1928, by The Ridgway Company, in the United States and Great Britain.

FREE! Book "How to Marcel Wave Your Own Hair," to all who reply.

Sensational New French Invention Gives A Perfect Marcel Wave in 15 Minutes —costs only 2¢

Not a concoction from a bottle—not a sticky, messy lotion—not a "trick" brush—not a "magic" cap—not an antiquated "curling" device—not a "scientific" substitute for the old-fashioned kid curler. This amazing French invention is *positively guaranteed actually to marcel wave any head of hair in 15 minutes at a cost of less than 2c.*

By Mlle. Renee Duval

FROM Paris I have brought to American women the greatest beauty secret of all time. French hairdressers have guarded it jealously for many years. This secret will enhance the beauty of any woman's hair a hundredfold. And there is but one simple, easy thing to do. Now every American woman and girl can know, for the first time, the real and true secret of the French woman's always perfectly marcelled hair—a thing that has caused American women much amazement.

Simple to Use—Perfect in Results

It is all so simple—a small, inexpensive, easy-to-use thing—the invention of a famous French hairdresser—it is called the Marcelwaver. I brought it to America—my friends here perfected it—then sent it to 1,000 American women to try for themselves. It gave such perfect results—proved of such great convenience—saved those who tried it so much money—that every one of these 1,000 women asked to keep it—and their friends sent me orders for thousands of Marcelwavers.

AGENTS!
Men and Women
Marcelwaver is taking American women by storm. Biggest earnings ever being made by agents everywhere. You must get in on ground floor before all territory is taken. Send—today—for complete information—all FREE!

This Secret Yours FREE!

Do not send me money—just name and address. I'll at once send you this secret—and a FREE copy of my famous book, "How to Marcel Wave Your Own Hair." Send today.

Mlle. Renee Duval
MARCELWAVER COMPANY
Dept. 150-E Cincinnati, Ohio

Mlle. Renee Duval, Dept. 150-E
MARCELWAVER CO., Cincinnati, Ohio

Please send me at once your precious secret of a perfectly marcelled head of hair in 15 minutes at a cost of less than 2c. This information must be FREE to me.

( ) ***Check here if interested in agent's offer.***

Name..

Address..

City.................... **State**....................

Relief from Curse o
CONSTIPATIO

A PROMINENT physician, of Battle Creek, Mich., says: "Constipation is a disease of civilization. Wild men and wild animals do not suffer from this malady, which is responsible for more misery than any other single cause."

But immediate relief from the scourge of constipation has been found. The Research Laboratories of the United Drug Company in Boston have developed a tablet which attracts water from the system into the dry, lazy evacuating bowel called the colon. This fluid softens and loosens the sluggish food waste and causes a gentle, complete evacuation.

Rexall Orderlies (the na
of these wonderful tablets fo
no habit and never require
increase of the dose.

Stop suffering from consti
tion. Chew a pleasant-tas
Rexall Orderly tonight bef
retiring and feel fine tomorr
Rexall Orderlies are sold o
at Liggett and Rexall D
Stores. Get a package of
tablets for 25 cents.

Save with Safety at yo
Rexall
DRUG STOR
Liggett's are also Rexall st

There is one near you

QUARTER CENTURY 1903 1928 Rexall

You
recog
by th

FRECKLE-FAC

Now is the Time to Get Rid of Th Ugly Spots

Here's a chance, Miss Freckleface, to try a remedy
freckles with the guarantee of a reliable concern th
will not cost you a penny unless it removes your freck
while if it does give you a clear complexion the expen
trifling.

Simply get an ounce of Othine—double strengt
from any drug or department store and a few appl
tions should show you how easy it is to rid yoursel
the homely freckles and get a beautiful complex
Rarely is more than one ounce needed for the worst c

Be sure to ask for the double strength Othine as
strength is sold under guarantee of money back if it
to remove your freckles.

FOREST RANGERS

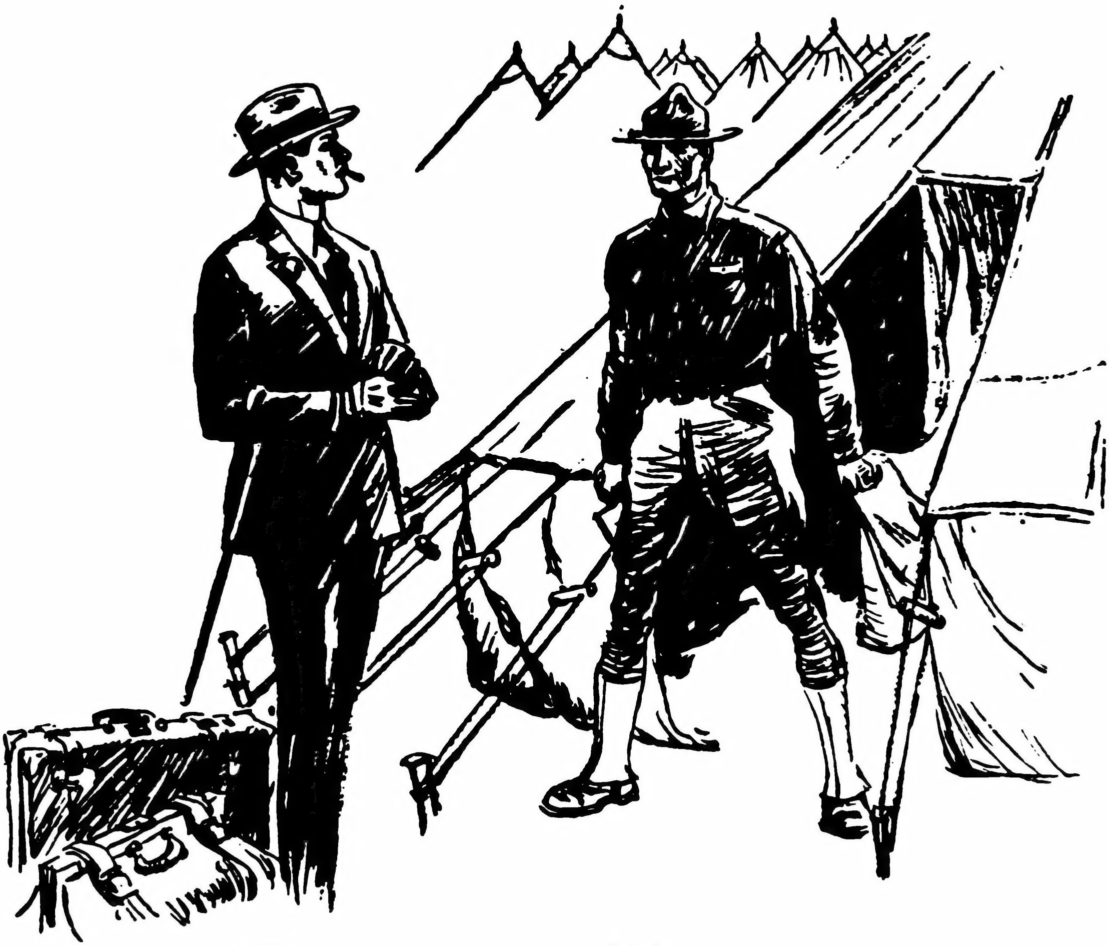
Do you enjoy outdoor life close to Nature? Get Fo
Ranger job; salary $125-$200 month and home furnis
plenty fishing, hunting, trapping; no strikes or s
downs; vacations on full pay. For further particulars,

NORTON INST. **2865 Temple Co
Denver, Col**

Adventure
TWICE A MONTH

too, has excitin
stories of far
off places. . 25

A Tale of the Mighty Mill of the Army



GOLD BARS

By ARED WHITE

IN RESPONSE to a gentle but persistent hand on his shoulder, Mr. Clarence Reginald Pilkington, to quote the name as it was recorded by the young gentleman's elegant calling card, opened one sleepy brown eye reluctantly. As the eye fell upon the dim outline of three familiar faces, the pale features about it gathered in an arrogant annoyance.

"Why bother me, Johnston?" Clarence complained to his valet. "Can't you see I'm not woke up yet?"

"But, sir," the faithful Johnston reminded him, "you instructed me that I was not to let you sleep after ten o'clock. Something of the greatest importance, you said, sir——"

"Get out, damit!" Clarence commanded. He snuggled closer to the pillow, drew a silken coverlet about his neck and yawned. "Wait until I—ring for you."

Johnston smoothed the coverlet with a patient and resigned "Very good, sir," drew the blinds and withdrew noiselessly from the bed chamber, followed by the two others. Until their employer had ended his night's sleep there was nothing else for them to do but wait. Questions affecting Mr. Pilkington's personal comfort were not debatable, Johnston had learned by long experience.

"What's in the air?" inquired Gunning, the Pilkington chauffeur, anxiously. "This is the first time he ever had the lot of us on the carpet at once. What have we done all wrong this time?"

"It's nothing like that," Johnston responded cheerfully. "This is the time when Clarence himself is in hot water. I can tell the water is scorching from the fact that he wouldn't get up. Every time he's got something unpleasant to face, Clarence likes to remain unconscious as long as possible."

"What in the devil could a Pilkington have to worry about?" Gunning demanded. "Even if he lost another breach of promise suit to a Broadway prima donna, it wouldn't be pin money out of the Pilkington pile."

"It's something tougher than that this time," said Johnston, an unsympathetic look in his eyes. "For once the famous Pilkington influence and the celebrated Pilkington luck have both flivvered, flattened out and flopped. So Clarence is in a sweet pickle."

"I can't picture it," said Gunning, incredulously.

"Then I'll enlighten you. Clarence has got to decide what he's going to do about taking on for war service. With the draft coming on, he's young enough and single enough and well enough so he ——"

The chauffeur's brows narrowed. "But I thought that was all settled a long time ago," he broke in. "Wasn't he to take on as a lieutenant or admiral or something of the sort—with a desk down at Washington?"

"That was exactly the plan," said Johnston, a note of sorrow creeping into his voice. "It was the plan I was waiting on so I could get rid of him and make my own jump into an artillery training camp. Then something slipped the other day."

"Has—has Clarence got cold feet?" Gunning demanded, sensing disaster to his own long delayed plans for enlistment.

Johnston reached for a leather brief case, took out a letter and handed it to Gunning.

"Read it and smile while you weep," he said.

The letter was from the fluent and influential Senator who, as senior member of a great law firm, for years had helped handle the profitable affairs of the vast Pilkington estate. It addressed the following vital information and advice to the present head of the house of Pilkington:

> **Dear Mr. Pilkington:**
>
> **I have come, just now, from a long conference with the Secretary of War on the matter of your commission.** He explained that the administration has turned officer appointments pretty much over to the Army and cannot deviate from that policy. The Army is naming appointments only from eligible classes—enlisted men of the service and graduates of officers' training camps.
>
> Since you are so averse to taking the officers' training camp, a distaste which is natural enough, it seems that the only alternative is to enlist in the service, so as to be eligible for commission from the ranks.
>
> My influential associates of the Military Affairs Committee assures me that they will go the limit in securing your appointment in the grade of lieutenant once you are eligible. Therefore, I do not hesitate to suggest that you enter the service at once by enlistment. Please wire me your organization and station as soon as you have done this and I will not rest until you have been given suitable recognition. I should have no difficulty since yours will be the first case upon which I have really gone to bat and I can hardly imagine being turned down on so small a favor. May I suggest that you enlist in the infantry branch as I am told that there are more than 100,000 officers to be appointed in that branch alone within the next year.
>
> I need not add that any service which I am able to perform in your behalf is a sincere pleasure to me and that your wishes will always have my first and most active consideration.
>
> **Most sincerely yours,**
> ***John H. Blessingham,*** U. S. S.

Gunning read heavily, his ruddy face bent low over the letter as he followed each word behind a slow-moving index finger. When he had finished, he looked up anxiously.

"Is—is the boss going to do it?"

"That," replied Johnston, "is exactly what I lay awake all night wondering. We'll know as soon as Clarence is awake and ready to make up his mind."

THE silvery notes of the call bell from their master's room brought them to their feet. Pierre, the Pilkington personal chef and third indispensable member of the Pilkington personal retinue, emerged from a gaping trance and followed them gingerly into the bed chamber as if haunted by uneasy foreboding. Johnston, after making certain that young Mr. Pilkington was really awake, let the light of day into the room and made to assist his master out of bed into his morning's bath. Clarence waved him aside with an abrupt gesture.

"Breakfast in bed, Johnston," he said in a subdued voice.

Pierre faded from the room to reappear in surprisingly short order behind a steaming silver service. Breakfast for one was served ceremoniously, a frill that the impressionable Mr. Pilkington had picked up during a prolonged stay in England before the war. Each dish went from Pierre to Johnston for inspection and then to Clarence for consumption. Prince or potentate was never served with greater show of solemnity, save for the occasional clandestine wink that Johnston bestowed upon Gunning.

Young Mr. Pilkington ate sparingly and in silence this morning. When he had finished he sat looking vacantly out of the window for a long time while he smoked one imported, monogrammed cigaret after another. Johnston, finally unable to suppress his impatience for the decision, set out to bring the subject to an issue.

"The more I think of it, the more disappointed I am in Senator Blessingham's letter," he suggested.

"Why should there be any room for such disappointment?" Mr. Pilkington inquired, crisply, turning upon him with annoyance. "Does he not very definitely tell me what to expect?"

"But, sir," Johnson parried, "I had been in hopes that the Senator would arrange it all at once without putting you to a lot of trouble in——"

"A mere detail," Clarence interrupted. "The Senator knows what he is doing—and besides he would not dare mess things up."

"Then you are going to follow his advice, sir?"

Young Pilkington lighted another cigaret with studied nonchalance and sought to speak with an easy unconcern.

"I shall do so at once," he announced.

Johnston managed to suppress a shout of joy. It was the moment he had been praying for, the moment when he would stand free of the irresistible Pilkington fortune, free for a trial at weaning himself of his five figure stipend as a super-menial to the arrogant Clarence. He clung to his expression of grave unconcern lest his own unholy interest be betrayed to Mr. Pilkington's intolerance of any emotion in his servants that did not wholly concern his own personal welfare.

"The best of luck, sir," said Johnston soberly. "We will all miss you very much."

Clarence turned to his valet with an indulgent smile. It was the smile he had used on those occasions when the indispensable Johnston had attempted to resign. It was always followed by a generous offer which Johnston could not refuse in spite of himself.

"I have no intention, Johnston, of abandoning you," he said. "I shall, of course, take you with me."

Johnston turned slightly pale as a premonition swept over him.

"I do not quite understand, sir."

"Arrange for your own enlistment at the same time," said Clarence easily. "I take it that you have no aversion to entering the service."

"No, sir—it isn't that," Johnston faltered. "But I have my own plans all laid to enter an artillery training camp as soon as you——"

"Absurd," Clarence broke in. The thought that Johnston had, or might have, ambitions of his own did not enter his mind. "We will follow Senator Blessingham's advice to the letter. We will also take Gunning and Pierre with us."

The cover of the silver service went clattering to the floor from Pierre's nerveless hand. Gunning dropped his cap and gloves.

"Sir, I have a wife dependent on me," Pierre pleaded almost tearfully. "I could not support her on a soldier's pay."

Clarence smiled again. "I shall, of course, make ample provision for all your dependents in addition to paying you your regular salaries while you are in the Army."

"That is very generous of you, sir," Johnston began a new protest. "But I have made up my mind to——"

"Not at all generous," Mr. Pilkington interrupted him again. "As my employees, I owe it to you to do this—and, besides, I rather count on having you look after my comfort. As an officer, it can be easily arranged that you oversee my personal affairs, so my good friend Colonel Farlingstone tells me."

Johnston groaned as he saw the Pilkington shackles encircling him once more. Gunning smiled broadly and Pierre brightened at learning that the Pilkington enlistment was not to take away the Pilkington largess.

"Arrange for our enlistment at four, and have dinner for Colonel Farlingstone and me at seven," commanded Mr. Pilkington with a finality that brought the discussion to a close.

II

GUNNING had the big imported limousine ready an hour ahead of time. With the aid of Pierre he bustled back and forth between the house and the car, transporting the master's bags one at a time as they were packed by the now moody and silent Johnston.

Chauffeur and chef had made up their minds fully to the venture. They were almost cheerful. After all, it was not so vastly different from previous experiences of being whisked onto the high seas for some distant port at a few hours' notice in their chosen vocation of ministering to the comforts of their whimsical employer.

Johnston continued to battle with uncertainty even while he went ahead with the work of preparing for the Pilkington departure. An impulse burned within him to renounce the Pilkington largess once and for all.

"It is now or never," he kept telling himself over and over, the while he neatly packed the Pilkington necessities in the rich Pilkington bags.

No matter how efficiently he functioned at it, Johnston had not set out to be a flunkey. One of those quirks of fate that set men adrift on strange currents had landed him in the Pilkington service in the first place. The elder Johnston and the elder Pilkington had passed on within the same week, one leaving unpaid funeral expenses and the other an income which the most ingenious extravagance could not dissipate. So the younger Pilkington left college to take charge of spending the Pilkington income and the younger Johnston left college to pay the Johnston debts. He went to work for young Mr. Pilkington as a confidential secretary.

Dreams of advancement to an important managerial place in the great Pilkington estate had inspired Johnston to put everything he had into his job. But his aspirations had been wrecked by the fact that Clarence Pilkington developed but one thought in life. His own personal comfort. So, little by little, Clarence had drawn the efficient Johnston into complete personal charge of his immediate welfare and affairs, a task Johnston did so well that his luxurious employer no longer was put to the annoyance of doing anything for himself. Johnston not only wrote all his letters, including very personal ones, but signed his name so expertly that no one could detect the difference.

As for increasing his supervalet's stipend to five figures, Clarence probably would have doubled the amount rather than be put to the bother of trying to replace Johnston.

"Can't be bothered with a servant problem," Pilkington was fond of telling his friends, always with a superior yawn. "Buy a man up and you own him—pay any man his price and you simply can't drive him away. Saves bother, you know."

These taunting words, which he had overheard more than once, rose now in Johnston's mind as he compared the meager pay he would receive in war service with the five-figured Pilkington anchor. He was lashing his inner revolt towards the point of resignation when Clarence appeared suddenly in the room.

"By the way, Johnston," he directed. "Arrange the details of payment of the three of you with the estate manager so it will come to you without our having to bother about it while we're away. Put the instructions in writing, draw it up the way it ought to be—and sign my name."

Johnston stood in uncertainty a moment. Then the fires of revolt suddenly died down as the habit of accepting Clarence's orders turned the delicately balanced scales of indecision. He knew suddenly that he was not going to seek his salvation in an artillery officers' training camp. Instea he was going forth as the valet of pampered private and later, when Senato Blessingham's influence at Washington had worked the miracle of his master's promotion, he would graduate into an enliste dog-robber to a desk shavetail.

"Very good, sir," he replied weakly.

AT FIFTEEN minutes of four o'clock Johnston ushered his master t a waiting limousine. The stor had spent itself again and he was now th alert valet-extraordinary whose every tale was engrossed with the Pilkington comfo and personal welfare.

Mr. Pilkington, in this moment of plung ing into the uncharted adventure of w service, made it a point to set a magnifice example to his retinue. His lean figure, usually somewhat stooped, was erect and stiff, his gait unhurried, his poise perfect. His placid, proud face with its pale, round features, bored brown eyes and small pouting mouth, was no more serious than when he went for an afternoon ride. It was just such an example as a Pilkington would be expected to set to his inferiors in such a critical moment.

"With the Pilkington influence looking after us, we have nothing in the world to worry us," Clarence remarked with assurance as he settled himself in the car. "Senator Blessingham would not dare fail after giving his advice."

The trusting Gunning and Pierre heard his words with a glow of satisfaction. Johnston alone detected the faint note of uneasiness in the Pilkington voice and knew that Clarence spoke to ease vague misgivings, much as he might whistle on a very dark night.

Thirty minutes later Clarence was something more than the pampered head of the house of Pilkington. He was an integral part of the national defense, a private in the United States Army. Thirty seconds after that the mighty Pilkington influence was in the throes of conflict with military authority. The red-faced recruiting sergeant precipitated the clash.

"You birds pull out for camp in a hour," the sergeant barked at them. "Keep outa the way over there in a corner till I call for you!"

"Pardon," remonstrated Mr. Pilkington, stepping personally into the emergency, "but I have a very important engagement for this evening."

"You bet you have," rejoined the sergeant. "You got a date with your Uncle Sammy—and you're goin' to keep it."

"It may interest you," Mr. Pilkington persisted dryly, "to know that I am enlisting on the advice of Senator Blessingham merely as a means to receiving commission as an officer."

The sergeant turned on Clarence and looked him over in an undetermined mood. Finally his face broke into an amused smile.

"Tell it to the funny papers," he said. "They're lookin' fer good jokes."

As Clarence turned livid under this wholly unprecedented affront, Johnston leaped into the breach before his master could stir the ire of the red-faced sergeant.

"It would be a great favor, sir," he said respectfully, "if you would allow us a few hours in the city. I know Mr. Pilkington really has a very important dinner engagement."

"Can't be did," snapped the sergeant. "My orders is to ship all rooks in time for them to be on hand at camp at reveille next day. That means you gotta be there at five in the morning. What's more, all rooks travel on one ticket—an' they's seven more of you comin' up for the six train today."

"We'd be willing to buy our own tickets if you would be good enough to let us take a later train," Johnston pleaded. "Say a train that would land us at camp by daylight."

"Fine excep' for one thing," the sergeant scoffed. "The six train is the last one through to camp until noon tomorrow —which is jes' seven hours after you're gonna be there."

"Pardon," Mr. Pilkington broke in stiffly, "I can arrange to leave later and be there at any hour necessary. Therefore I see no reason for being denied my rights of keeping my engagement."

The sergeant bristled this time.

"If you'll jes' reduce that wisecrack to sane langwich," he sneered, "if you'll jes' show me how you're goin' to be at camp by five in the mornin' when they ain't no later train gets there 'fore noon—an' they ain't no open auto road from here through—why I'll—I'll make you a present o' my p'mission on a engraved card with my autograph photo. For a recruit you're as promisin' a——"

The recruiting sergeant broke off and expressed his further contempt with his eyes as he looked the elegant Mr. Pilkington over again from head to foot. Clarence turned away with a superior scorn, as if the sergeant had ceased to exist to his knowledge.

"You heard, Johnston, what this person said," he addressed his valet. "Kindly get in touch at once with the railroad company and arrange a special train to deliver us at the beastly place in the morning."

Private Pilkington flecked an invisible speck from the sleeve of his imported afternoon coat, turned easily about and sauntered to his limousine by way of expressing his contempt of the sergeant's affronts. The astounded sergeant, trapped by his own extravagant promise, stood gaping impotently after him.

"I take it," Clarence said to his retinue, the light of easy triumph in his face, "I take it that we shall have quite our own way in the Army."

A SPECIAL train with the right of way into camp, and guaranteed to deliver the four recruits at camp well before reveille, was negotiated by Johnston, the hour of departure at twelve o'clock midnight. This arrangement gave them the evening to themselves. Rather, it gave Mr. Pilkington the evening while the others idly waited at the big ancestral mansion for any need that might arise for their services.

Johnston prepared with great care the telegram to Senator Blessingham notifying him of the enlistment so that the astute political miracle worker might lose no time in putting the Pilkington lieutenancy into force and effect. He took the draft at once into the dining-room where his master was dining with Lieutenant-Colonel F. Brockton Farlingstone of His Majesty's forces, now in the United States with the British advisory commission on American military participation in the war.

"You're quite right, dear chap, to have your servants with you," the British officer was advising his host as Johnston entered the room and stood, telegram in hand, awaiting his master's pleasure. "It's a nasty game at best, and without one's body servants, at least, it would be unbearable."

"Is a fellow allowed to carry his servants around with him wherever he goes in the service?" Clarence inquired, ignoring his valet's presence.

"Indeed, yes," Colonel Farlingstone affirmed. "By all means in our service—and I presume yours will be modeled on similar lines, since we are here to—ah—advise. Now there's dear Lord Rawlston; has his valet with him right at the front. Goes over the top with him at times. Leftenant of foot troops, y'know. Enlisted as a common soldier and all that bally sort of thing, so as not to——"

"You mean to say Lord Rawlston is serving as a common soldier?" Clarence broke in anxiously.

"Dear, dear, no!" protested the colonel. "I referred to his valet, his batman, dear chap. You couldn't make a leftenant out of a bally valet—common fellah—although upon my word this war is breaking down standards a bit wantonly."

Johnston, flushing scarlet, made bold to step forward and place the telegram under his master's eye for approval. Clarence glanced at it lightly and continued his absorbed interview with his military adviser.

"It sounds odd to me that a fellow of Lord Rawlston's position should be nothing more than a lieutenant," Pilkington commented.

"A bit so, yes," Colonel Farlingstone agreed. He paused to twist the ends of his waxed mustache. "But then the higher grades are necessarily given, y'know, to gentlemen of demonstrated ability. Time was, I remember, when a leftenant-colonelcy in no less a regiment than the—ah—Coldstream Guards went for twenty-five hundred pounds to any member of the aristocracy. But since the beastly war——"

"It's my observation," Clarence interrupted with a sophisticated smile, "that you can buy anything you are willing to pay the price for."

"Oh, indeed, yes," assented Colonel Farlingstone. "But really this war is changing things a bit dreadfully. Perfectly proper to require real merit in the higher grades, but the beastly practice is being abused. Common fellahs of no breeding are being advanced as high as majors. Really the worst thing about the bally war, this breaking down of decent standards. Much better, I'd say, to worry along somehow without so many officers."

Mr. Pilkington's mind drifted, during the colonel's academic speech, to the fact of Johnston's presence in the room and the reason for it. He took the telegram up and read it with approving interest.

"Excellent, Johnston," he dismissed his valet. "An order for my commission, Colonel. It is all arranged in advance by Senator Blessingham."

"No doubt, having so large and new an army, you are acquiring considerable rank, dear chap," Colonel Farlingstone effused. "A captaincy, what?"

"No, I'm starting out as a lieutenant," Clarence confessed. "Later, when I'm settled, I expect to arrange for such rank as I want. The Pilkington influence will attend to all that."

"Congratulations," exclaimed the colonel

"A fellah can't decently stay out of service at such a time, y'know, regardless of rank. At least a leftenancy preserves your position as a gentleman, and once you are launched on your military career, I have no doubt advancement will come to you."

"As I said before, the Pilkington influence will take good care of that," smiled Clarence with the easy assurance of one who has witnessed the working of many political and legal miracles in his day.

III

THE darkness in the stuffy private sleeping car was not artificial when young Mr. Pilkington opened one weary eye the next morning and blinked dazedly into the somber face of his valet-extraordinary. It simply was not yet daybreak and Clarence's weary body recoiled at the thought of getting up at any such unearthly hour.

"Why bother me, Johnston?" he complained to his valet. "Can't you see I'm not woke up yet?"

"But, sir, we are on the siding outside of camp. I'm sorry, but you've got to get up and have your breakfast."

"Get out, damit!" Clarence commanded, snuggling closer to the pillow and drawing the covers about his neck. "Don't call me again until I wake up."

Johnston gently but firmly drew the covers back and shook his weary master lightly. "It can't be helped," he persisted. "Remember we are in the Army this morning and have just time enough to get to camp by five."

As if in startled recollection of his whereabouts, Mr. Pilkington sat up with a start, yawned disconsolately and stretched himself. "Bother the beastly camp," he complained.

The Pilkington personal routine of arising and breakfasting was followed out as when they were at home. Johnston had the shower ready in the sumptuous private car. Pierre brought in breakfast and it was served with no loss of ceremony. Gunning appeared the moment breakfast was over with a taxicab in tow, so that Clarence was able to invade the military camp with a minimum of inconvenience.

As they drove into the huge forest of khaki tents, Johnston took the details of proper entry into the Army firmly into his own hands. He ferreted out the place of reporting, learned that they were to report to H Company of a new regiment, directed the car to the first sergeant's tent and went inside to get final bearings.

"My party is in camp, sir, with instructions to report at five o'clock. I was directed here for further information," Johnston explained politely.

"Where's the rest of your crowd?" demanded the first sergeant, a soldier of the old school, level eyed, abrupt, efficient, as a first sergeant must be, what with the responsibility of six fussy officers and two hundred or more helpless men on his shoulders.

"They are waiting outside, sir, while I——"

"So that's what that noisy taxi was bringing in," commented the sergeant. "Well, chase 'em in here for a once over. I like to see what kind of cattle is herded in on H Company."

The first sergeant's eyes were as sharp as his voice. A swift glance gave him information enough for an outline biography of Gunning, Pierre and Johnston. His eyes tarried a moment in uncertainty upon Clarence.

"Know anything valuable—music, bricklayin', mendin' watches or any cute little civilian trick?" he demanded.

Private Pilkington spoke up in spite of Johnston's effort to head him off. "I suppose I should explain at once my purpose in coming here," he said impressively. "I am here merely——"

"To prevent confusion, let me explain what you're here for," broke in the first sergeant. "The first thing you are here for is to answer my questions. What I asked was—are you worth a damn for anything in particular—got any trades or tricks the Army can make use of. If so, now's the time to sing out, so we can get it on your record."

"I am Mr. Clarence Pilkington, of Pittsburg," said Clarence in a voice that had never failed to subdue even the most officious policeman. "I wish to explain the circumstances of——"

"Attention!" shouted the sergeant, turning ironically to his company clerk. "Get on your feet there, Corporal, and remove your hat. Private Clarence Pilkington is here from Pittsburg."

The company clerk looked up from his

typewriter and smiled broadly. Clarence turned scarlet under the affront. Before he could find his voice the first sergeant proceeded with the interrogation.

"Now that we've been properly introduced," he said, "perhaps you will be good enough to answer my question. Speak up!"

"But what I was trying to tell you—" Clarence began stiffly, only to be sharply cut off again.

"Answer my question and cut out your palaver!" snapped the sergeant.

"Sir, what Mr. Pilkington had in mind," broke in the anxious Johnston, "was telling you a personal matter relating to his future service."

"Your turn to speak will be when you're spoken to," said the first sergeant with a sharp look at Johnston. He fixed his gaze upon Clarence again. "What you do in civil life to make a living?"

"I have sufficient means not to give thought to such matters," Clarence replied.

"Did you ever do anything—roll Pittsburg stogies, run a brewery, or anything useful to the Army?"

"Most certainly, I have not."

The first sergeant groaned. "My God," he complained. "Then you ain't worth a damn for nothing—you'll even have to be learned how to peel potatoes, or handle a broom—whichever I decide you're cut out for."

"I had expected," said Private Pilkington, drawing himself up and speaking in a voice that trembled his outraged feeling, "I had expected to be received here with ordinary civility."

The first sergeant looked back at him with a slow smile. "You'll live to learn," he said, "that you're mighty lucky, the way you breezed in here, not to go rollin' out on one ear."

"Enough of this unwarranted impertinence," Clarence exploded. "Perhaps you will be good enough to let me know if my commission as a lieutenant has arrived here yet?"

The sergeant sobered at this remark, coming as it did with such blunt directness and certainty. Emergency officers reported in the most unaccountable fashion these days when they were being manufactured by the tens of thousands out of raw civilian material in the training camps.

"Which one of the camps was your commission being sent from?" he asked much less abruptly. "It's the first I've heard of it."

"From Senator Blessingham," Clarence blurted out. "I am expecting the Senator to act without delay as he has promised to do."

"Oh, yes, sir," the first sergeant affirmed, his eyes sparkling. "I forgot for the moment. Senator Blessingham sent in two bags of lieutenancies on the morning mail. Sorry sir, but we was short of fodder and had to feed 'em to the supply company mules."

The sergeant of the second section of the third platoon poked his tousled head through the flap of the orderly tent at this critical moment and looked inquiringly at the first sergeant.

"Here, Brown," the first sergeant hailed him. "Here's four rooks that go to your section. Unusually raw. Hustle 'em out of here and have the tailor supply them with natty O. D. frock coats so they can get started on their new careers."

"I appear to be at somewhat of a disadvantage," Private Pilkington protested icily as he turned to leave the orderly tent. "At the proper time you shall have cause to regret your witticisms at my expense."

"I almost forgot to mention it," the first sergeant called after the section chief, ignoring Clarence, "but if Private Pilkington keeps on sounding off, send him over to the mule picket for shovel duty. It'll give him a chance to look for a stray commission Senator Blessingham sent down here for him."

THE fire of outraged dignity that burned within Clarence's breast as he went down the H Company street threatened to consume him. Never before had anyone dared offend him, even mildly. And now, to be exposed to the boorish affronts of such a person in the very presence of his own servants was unthinkable.

"I'll protest this outrage to Senator Blessingham by telegram before this day is over," he threatened.

"It might be better to pay no attention to it, sir," pleaded Johnston. "I got the idea it was just a way he has."

"A way he has?" repeated Clarence disgustedly. He turned to the section leader by way of ignoring his spiritless retainer.

"Is there no restraint of decency placed upon that insulting fellow back there?" he demanded.

"Listen, rook," said the section sergeant. "You're in the Army now. That bird's the Top Cutter of this outfit an' it musta been you got his nanny. Rooks sometimes do."

"But I don't intend to yield my——"

"Pipe down, rook—or I'll have to put you at the business end of a shovel down there behind the donks."

"My God—what an outrage," shuddered Private Pilkington, suddenly realizing the immediate hopelessness of his situation.

Thereafter, as he was put through the processes of being outfitted in his new rôle of private of infantry, Clarence took refuge in a dignified aloofness, since in no other way could he escape the humiliating jibes that seemed to be in the air in this outlandish place. For the first time in his luxuriously appointed life, Clarence got wearing apparel from a shelf. The supply sergeant measured him with a casual glance and cast garments across the rough board counter to him. Johnston took the equipment, along with his own, and the four were escorted to a vacant squad tent.

"You birds can have this tent all to yourselves till some more men arrive to fill up the squad," said the section sergeant. "There's cots inside. Now get in there and climb into them uniforms."

"Pardon." Private Pilkington arrested the sergeant as he was turning away and drew him to one side. He had not intended to say more, but the humiliation before him demanded protest. "You will do me a very great service," said Clarence, "if you will put me in an altogether different tent—one near by, preferably."

"What's wrong with that'n?" asked the sergeant. "Only four of you in there."

"I cannot decently live in the tent with those chaps," Clarence explained.

"Why—I thought from the way you all acted they was buddies o' your'n," said the sergeant. "What's the row about?"

"You will understand," said Clarence very confidentially. "Those are my personal servants."

The sergeant's eyes widened and he looked at Clarence in perplexity for some moments as if unable to fathom such a situation. Then his brows knit and his voice became hard.

"Say, you're gettin' my nanny, too," he said with visibly rising temperature. "You're a high private in the Army now and you better climb down outa the clouds an' begin functionin' as such."

"I did not enter the Service for the purpose of being a private," Clarence explained, holding his temper. "I am expecting to receive my commission as an officer at any time, if you care to know."

The sergeant looked incredulous. "They been puttin' officers' bars on some mighty queer critters since this man's war started," he said. "But long as you're a private in my section, by God you're goin' to act like one! Take it from me you'll be peelin' spuds or tendin' mules 'fore night if you don't snap into it."

Clarence stood in speechless indignation, staring at the retreating figure of the section chief as the noncom went stamping away. Then he turned dumbly into the squad tent and joined his three comrades in arms in a sudden mood of disgusted resignation.

"For the moment I suppose I must make the best of this disgusting situation," he salved his battered dignity.

"That is the best course to take, sir," Johnston agreed promptly.

But Private Pilkington's acquiescence was short lived. The crowning affront of this new world came a few moments later when Johnston had helped him into the coarse, woolly issue uniform.

"An indecent outrage!" Clarence stormed as he surveyed such of his appearance as was visible to the unaided eye in the mirrorless tent. "Unfit for a clown—these rags."

Not even the unsympathetic first sergeant could have objected honestly to Private Pilkington's estimate of this habiliment as a first line defender of the country's honor. The fuzzy, shapeless blouse and baggy, meandering breeches were made to cover the body but not to fit the form of any man, much less the trim Pilkington anatomy. Dressed in his full regalia, including oversize field shoes and shrunken campaign hat, he resembled more than vaguely the outlines of a film clown garbed for modern farce comedy.

His retinue surveyed Clarence gravely while Johnston attempted to reassure him that the uniform fitted him no more absurdly than did their own, or those worn by the other soldiers they had seen since coming to camp.

"Again, sir, may I counsel patience," Johnston pleaded. "In a day or two, when the Senator has secured your commission, you will be in a humor to have a good laugh at all this."

"Laugh?" echoed Clarence. "My God, Johnston, are you losing your senses altogether? Is there anything to suggest mirth to any sane man in the coarse insults that have been forced on me today? Stop talking nonsense and help me off with these ridiculous rags instantly!"

"You mustn't do that, sir," Johnston reasoned with him. "You will only get yourself in hot water if you appear without your uniform."

"Then you refuse?" Clarence accused him hotly. "Very well, Johnston, since this situation is entirely over your head, I will take matters into my own hand!"

He broke off to go bristling out through the flap of the squad tent without plan or direction but with his tolerance of the impossible world about him wholly at an end. Out of the depths of his despair a plan of release slowly shaped itself as he walked on and on through the drab forest of tents. His pace and his pulse quickened as the plan crystallized. He would go on the first train to the National Capitol, lay the whole impossible situation before Senator Blessingham and insist that his commission be produced by the Senator without further delay.

Clarence was passing the exit of camp at a quickening gait, en route to find a taxi, when a sharp voice intervened.

"Halt! What's the big hurry all about?"

The challenge came from a square-faced young man who wore a holstered pistol, carried a long, thin club and had on the sleeve of his uniform a blue brassard with the letters "M. P." superimposed in white.

"I'm in a hurry to catch a train north," Clarence explained with some impatience.

"You act to me like you was tryin' to sneak out," said the M. P. roughly. "Now les' have a squint at them orders."

"What orders?" Clarence inquired. "I have nothing of the sort in my possession."

"Jest what I suspected," sneered the soldier. "Now you chase right back there where you come from—and don't lemme catch you tryin' to sneak this post again!"

"Am I to understand," Clarence demanded, suddenly sensing the situation, "that I am a prisoner in this place?"

"You sure will be one if you don't get movin' back into camp," the M. P. threatened.

For several moments Clarence stood in indecision while the military policeman glared at him. Then, realizing the futility of protest, explanation or other act of reason, he turned about and made his way slowly back to his only haven of refuge and sympathy in this place of black despair.

IV

THROUGH fretful hours of acute discomfort Private Pilkington tossed and squirmed between prickly woolen blankets on the hard army cot. It was the first time in his carefully ordered life that he had not lain between linen sheets on a comfortable bed at night. The contrast did not invite rest.

Johnston finally improvised a mattress of army overcoats, topped by his master's velvet bathrobe. Three suits of silk pajamas were arranged into a substitute for sheets. But Johnston was helpless to stop the snoring that broke forth all about them at taps. It was long after midnight before Private Pilkington had fretted himself into exhaustion and been swallowed up by the mercy of sleep. And in the next instant, as it seemed, there was a hand on his shoulder. Clarence opened one weary brown eye.

"Why bother me, Johnston?" he complained. "Can't you see I'm not woke up yet?"

"But, sir," Johnston reminded him, "it's reveille. We've all got to be out there in line in just ten minutes."

Private Pilkington sat up with a nervous start. He blinked uncertainly at the others as they stood by his cot with his uniform ready to help him dress. Then he yawned prodigiously and settled back on the cot.

"Get out, damit," he ordered, closing his eyes and snuggling close to the improvised pillow. "I'm sleepy."

The alert first sergeant, calling the company roll with the speed and snap of a machine gun, did not detect that one voice answered "here" for two different names. Nor was the absence of Private Pilkington noted in the brisk morning run that preceded breakfast. At the sacrifice of his own breakfast, the faithful Johnston negotiated with the company cook for special viands and took them to the squad tent where he induced his master to sit up and sip hot coffee so that he would be wide awake by drill assembly which came in half an hour.

"Damnable stuff," Private Pilkington commented with a wry face at the wholly unfamiliar taste of army chicory. "Tastes like muddy water looks."

But having gone supperless to bed the night before, he drank the stuff and ate, without comment, the grapefruit and eggs that the obliging H Company cook had abstracted, for a consideration, from the officers' private ice box.

"I miss the morning papers," said Clarence, in a better humor after eating. "If I have to stay in this abominable prison another day, I hope some provision can be made for my personal comfort. I am not accustomed to the life of an Igorot."

"I will do the very best I can, sir," Johnston assured him dubiously.

Johnston, as he got the hang of things in camp, was able to accomplish swift wonders. Before the day was out, his resourcefulness had the problem well in hand of preserving Private Pilkington's tender sensibilities and cultivated tastes from needless violence at the hands of military disciplinarians.

When Private Pilkington flunked out at drill with the recruit squad and was put on kitchen police, it was Johnston who arranged matters with the cook so that someone else willingly peeled Clarence's share of the potatoes. It was Johnston who bargained secretly with the cook for special foods, to be cooked and served by Pierre immediately before mess call. Johnston, after drill, had linen sheets sent out from town, bought canvas camp chairs, smuggled in a small iron bed with real wire springs and provided other minor necessities of existence.

So, in the two long days that followed, Private Pilkington found the place less a nightmare. His uniform was laid out for him each morning, his shoes shined, his bed made and other menial details attended to. Pierre prepared his meals for him as of old. As for his place in the kitchen crew, meant as a penalty, it provided him with an effective refuge during these endless hours of marking time while awaiting the word from Washington. Johnston had been lavish with the cook so that Private Pilkington not only did not have to soil his hands and ruffle his dignity with potato peeler and scrub brush, but he was treated with great deference by the crew; even if these courtesies were attended by covert winks and grimaces behind his back.

"Confound it, Johnston," Private Pilkington was complaining on the morning of the third day as he sat at breakfast in the squad tent before drill. "It seems to me that Senator Blessingham is taking his own time——"

He paused, disagreeably conscious of the presence of someone who had eased in through the flap. It was the first sergeant. Gunning was at work cleaning the Pilkington field brogans, Pierre was pouring a fresh cup of coffee, while Johnston was wrapping on his master's cloth puttees.

"What kinda damn foolishness is going on here?" the first sergeant inquired, looking from one to the other in amazement.

Johnston, caught between his two immediate masters, and responsible to both, replied tactfully.

"We are in the employ of this gentleman, Sergeant," he explained, "and we are helping him with his work—before drill time."

"Dog-robbing, eh? Well, they ain't no private on earth rates a striker."

"But we have been in Mr. Pilkington's employ for several years, Sergeant, and we agreed——"

"Employed at what?"

"I am his val—his secretary. Gunning there is his chauffeur and Pierre his chef."

"Ah, some crew. No wonder you act spoiled, Private Pilkington. Well, it's all different after this. You're in the Army now." The sergeant's eyes kindled. "And just to think that you birds are worth a damn for something after all. Gunning—you report to brigade headquarters; they need a good chauf for the general. Pierre, you report to the regimental officers' mess. Good cooks are scarcer'n hen's teeth." He turned to Johnston again. "What's your specialty?"

"Nothing special, Sergeant,"

"Then you stay here and drill. You look like we might be able to make a soldier out of you."

"But have I no rights whatever in regards to my own servants?" Private Pilkington demanded as the first sergeant turned to leave, motioning chauffeur and chef before him. "Colonel Farlingstone advised me——"

"That'll be all from you," snapped the first sergeant. "I gave you a nice job as potato butcher, but if I catch you malingering on the job again, I'm going to make you a mule chambermaid."

Clarence paced the narrow tent in heavy, brooding silence for some time after the sergeant left. "Johnston," he announced at last, grimly, "I shall protest this outrage immediately. Prepare a telegram to Senator Blessingham."

NOT even the simulated deference of the kitchen crew assuaged Private Pilkington's now thoroughly outraged feelings through the insufferable day that followed. He went without his noon meal, since there was no one to cook it and he could not bring himself to eat beans and potatoes out of a tin dish. His hopes of early relief lay in the scorching telegram that had gone to the Senator. There were five hundred words of that telegram and it had not minced matters. It called upon the Senator to do his bit—and do it now.

Evening was approaching and Private Pilkington's morale was at its lowest ebb when the first sergeant walked into the kitchen, an accusing grin on his face.

"So you've been playin' a little snaky politics?" he sneered.

Clarence, having no further relish for an exchange of words with this blunt ruffian, took refuge in glum silence. But the sergeant's next statement stirred him to sudden animation.

"We just got a telegram from the War Department to give you ten days' furlough, with p'mission to visit Washington, D. C. Here's your orders—signed, sealed and delivered."

"Thank you," said Clarence stiffly, the flood of joy within him tempered by the sergeant's belittling attitude. "Am I at liberty to leave at once?"

"Or sooner," affirmed the sergeant. "But don't forget to be back here by midnight of the tenth day if you know what's healthy for you."

"It may interest you," Clarence asserted, "to know that I have been called concerning my commission as a lieutenant."

"So I inferred," said the sergeant in the same bantering voice. "If you blow back here a looey—I'll be down to greet you with a click of the heels and my best salute. If you lose out in the battle of the Potomac, though, I'll have your old job waitin' for you when you come marchin' home next week. Adios."

It was dark and silent at camp when Private Clarence Reginald Pilkington, 5th squad, H Company, ——th United States Infantry, reported in ten days later, a bare half hour before the expiration of his furlough at midnight.

He slumped with heavy tread down the H Company tent row to his own canvas bed-chamber. Senator Blessingham had done his very best—but the lieutenancy was still in the future. The best they had gotten was an Army politician's promise to deliver a Signal Corps commission in the Spruce Division to the Senator's favored constituent. And that must await upon a further expansion of the overworked Spruce Service. As for the commission in a combat outfit—it simply wasn't being done that way in this war. Not so soon after the Spanish-American unpleasantness.

Worse. Pending his promotion, Private Pilkington must return to grade and duty. Senator Blessingham was helpless to do more than extend sympathy and sound advice. Clarence must make the best of the matter, try to fit himself into the situation and wait in patience for the expansion of the Sprucers.

Groping his way into the tent, he found the electric light globe and switched on the light to behold a disconcerting sight. The tent had been filled up with men. His iron bed was gone and in its place a springless Army cot with sheetless blankets and an overcoat for a pillow. He awakened Johnston with a vigorous shake.

"What does this mean, Johnston?" Clarence demanded. "What has become of my effects?"

"Sh—s—sh!" cautioned Johnston, rubbing his eyes. "It's long after taps—that light'll have to come out."

"Damit, I never heard such impertinence as this, Johnston," said Clarence. "Unwrap these abominable leggings while we——"

Johnston reached up and turned out the light. "You'll have the whole squad in the hoosegow for making a disturbance after taps," he said rather brusquely. "Good night."

THE first gray touch of dawn was in the air when Private Pilkington finally tossed his way into an exhausted sleep. And again there was that inconsiderate hand on his shoulder shaking him back into the misery of wakefulness. He opened a heavy eye and as it fell upon the hazy outlines of Johnston, his face puckered into acute annoyance.

"Why bother me, Johnston?" he complained. "Can't you see I'm not woke up yet?"

"First call for reveille has sounded," replied Johnston, shaking his master with more than ordinary vigor.

"Get out, damit," yawned Clarence, snuggling closer to his overcoat and pulling a woolly army blanket about his neck. "I'm sleepy."

The next moment Private Pilkington was violently awake, sprawled on the floor beside his overturned cot. He climbed to his feet, dumbfounded, purple with rage, and faced his valet who all too clearly was guilty of this violence.

"Johnston—an explanation!" he cried. "An explanation or I shall dismiss you on the spot."

"I've saved you that trouble, Private Pilkington," said Johnston calmly. "You'll find my resignation in your overcoat pocket—dated three days ago. Now you get into your uniform, and make it snappy!"

For some moments Private Pilkington stood in speechless amazement trying to fathom Johnston's irrational outbreak. Johnston's attitude only deepened the mystery. He stood there looking back with a steady, dominating stare in which there was not even a flickering suggestion of apology or regret.

"An indecent outrage, Johnston," Clarence denounced him. "A gentleman is entitled to proper respect from his—inferiors, even when they have quit his service."

"Yes," Johnston affirmed in a level voice, "and a corporal is entitled to proper obedience from those under him. Now you get into your uniform and ready for drill without further debate, Pilkington."

Private Pilkington's eyes caught the bright new chevrons on Johnston's right sleeve.

"Johnston—you mean you are now the—the corporal here?" he gasped, as if incredulous of the evidence of his own eyes.

"I mean exactly that," said Corporal Johnston.

V

A STRANGE impulse whispered in Private Pilkington's ear during the next hour as he dragged the tattered remnants of his pride here and yon over the drill field at the sharp commands of the man who had been his valet. An impulse to throw himself into the drill, master its details and beat the now despised Johnston at his own game. Johnston had only a few days the start of him and there was no question in Clarence's mind of his own inherent superiority.

But a belief in the infallibility of the Pilkington influence and natural right of preferment was bred in his bone. This belief mastered him. After all, he told himself, his best course lay in biding his time until Senator Blessingham had acted. Then he would be in position to crush this upstart and put him in his proper place. Nothing would be gained by competing in these lower grades of the drill field.

As if in confirmation of this belief, an unexpected intervention came before the end of the second hour of drill. Where the vaunted Pilkington influence had failed for the moment at Washington, it asserted itself here suddenly at camp in Private Pilkington's behalf. A new Pilkington ally, unheralded and unsuspected, came to his rescue.

This ally was none other than the cook of H Company who appeared at the first sergeant's tent, his red, fat face wrinkled in protest.

"Sure, Sergeant," he grumbled at the Top Cutter, "an' what you mean takin' away me trained help?"

"What you kicking about now, Haggerty?" inquired the sergeant.

"You robbed me o' Private Pilkington—me best K. P. Out there drillin' he is, this minute—and me short o' good men to get dinner fer this mob."

The sergeant looked at Cook Haggerty searchingly. "What's this, a joke? That bird ain't worth a damn and you know it!"

"Sure an' if I ain't competent to pick me own help—you can get a new cook!"

Lest there be any further misunderstanding of his sincerity, Cook Haggerty began removing the cook's apron.

"See here, Haggerty," the sergeant placated his indispensable first cook, "I wasn't trying to crab your work. I was just trying to give you a tip. You been around me enough years to know I know a man when I see one—and that one's a lemon. All I took him away for was to bang the kinks out of him, so you see I don't think he's worth having any fuss about. Go get him if you want him, and keep him till the war's over for all I give a damn."

"If that's the lay," said Haggerty, returning the loop of his apron to his neck, "I'll stick. Long as a man suits me work, I'm not seein' where you got any cut-in."

The sergeant stood looking after Haggerty as he went personally out into the drill field to recover his coveted kitchen assistant. He shook his head in perplexity.

"I'd 'a' swore that bird wouldn't never get by in Haggerty's kitchen," he said to himself. "Maybe there's too many of them queer civilians coming in now for me to guess 'em all."

SO IT was that Private Pilkington was returned to his haven in the H Company kitchen. And his new ally developed into one of real service, rare sympathy and vast power. No sooner had Private Pilkington taken him into confidence regarding his impending commission than Cook Haggerty arranged it that the new K. P. need not report back to the fifth squad for sleep.

"You're goin' to get treated like a comin' officer," Haggerty vowed. "Sure an' I'm havin' no bird like that corporal tryin' to carry on wid his superiors."

The thoughtful and considerate cook also very shortly arranged a personal tent for Private Pilkington. This he did by the simple expedient of moving into the kitchen out of his own tent. He permitted this favorite K. P. to remain in bed, too, as long as he wished each morning. And when Private Pilkington did finally appear, he was served with breakfast from the best rations in the kitchen, such as they were. A sore point with the star boarder, since the best consisted usually of nothing more than bacon, potatoes, toast and coffee.

For his own part, Cook Haggerty appeared suddenly in the rôle of a heavy plunger in the crap games of the older non-coms. When he lost his all, as he usually did, it no longer eliminated him from the next session. Time was when the game after pay day was a progressive elimination contest, narrowing down finally until the last lucky two met to decide who got the whole company pay roll. Now here was Haggerty showing up for the finals even after he had been cleaned the night before.

It was a mystery that led to suspicion. The first sergeant began nosing about. His inquiry developed the fact that Private Pilkington, the indispensable K. P., was leading a sheltered life. Hard-driven serfs of the exacting Haggerty let bits of information slip that put the first sergeant on a definite clew. But just as the sergeant was preparing to let fall the hard hand of drastic discipline, out of the clear sky dropped an unprecedented miracle—another miracle of traditional Pilkington luck. One that lifted Cook Haggerty's pet K. P. from the loathing of the kitchen crew to a place as the most popular man in H Company—an idol whom it was not wise to destroy lightly.

Private Pilkington had gone to the captain, direct, with a complaint. After he had been dressed down for appearing without permission and given a lesson in military courtesy, Private Pilkington, hat in hand, heels together and, prefacing his remarks with proper words of military salutation, was permitted to state his case.

"Sir," he said, using that unaccustomed word gingerly, "I wish to inquire why I, as an individual, cannot be permitted to purchase such food as I wish, so long as I pay for it?"

"What's wrong with the mess?" demanded the company commander. "I've heard no complaints. What's more, I've inspected every meal and see no reasonable cause for complaint."

"I have not been accustomed to such food and it does not agree with me. Cook Haggerty has no objection, but said it would take your permission. I want to arrange to have food sent out from town." Private Pilkington spoke with the assurance of unassailable logic.

"The fact that you are comparatively a recruit accounts for such nonsense," snapped the captain. "But you look intelligent enough to see for yourself that the men must eat the same food if we are to have morale."

"If that is the case," said Clarence, unwilling lightly to abandon a subject so close to his heart, "is it not possible to provide better food for the company?"

"Possible, but not probable," said the captain disagreeably. "The United States makes a ration allowance of thirty-three cents. That, I feel, is being used very discreetly by this company. It'd take a dollar a day to please the bellies of some of you green recruits."

"But that—that doesn't seem to be a very excessive amount—sir," argued the persistent Pilkington.

"Oh, no. A mere bagatelle," assented the captain, a caustic note in his voice. "A mere sixty-seven cents a day when you deduct the Government allowance. Multiply that by two hundred and it is a hundred and thirty-four dollars a day for the whole of H Company—a trifling monthly total of four thousand and twenty dollars. Perhaps, Private Pilkington, you can advise me just how I am to raise that paltry sum."

Private Pilkington stood before the captain in a reflective attitude for a moment, then reached into the bellows pocket of his army blouse and brought forth his checkbook.

"To whom, sir," he inquired, "shall I make my check payable covering the next thirty days?"

It was thus that H Company became the best fed outfit in the Army, and Private Pilkington became its most popular soldier. And, what was more important to the company's benefactor, his privileges as special kitchen police multiplied. He got up when he chose, ate when he was hungry, and received a deference and a rough admiration that restored his absolute confidence in the Pilkington destiny.

Not only did the captain now wink at Private Pilkington's pampered idleness but he instructed the first sergeant that H Company could well afford to carry him as excess baggage.

"That bird's effect on morale is invaluable," the captain enthused. "You can't beat a well fed outfit with a big mess fund. Treat him gently and pass the word around to keep it quiet. If it ever gets out that we got an angel like this, regiment or brigade will steal him from us in a holy minute."

"I'm afraid, sir, it's too good to last," said the first sergeant. "This bird Pilkington claims to be all lined up for a lieutenant's commission. Says that's the reason he enlisted, so to be eligible for appointment from the ranks. Hanged if he hasn't got me to believin' it."

The captain reflected upon this somberly. "That'd be a calamity once the men get to expecting stewed humming bird on toast," he commented. "Sergeant, why don't you interest him in bucking for a commission right here? Paint a nice, rosy picture; tell him I'd send him to school the very first chance if he wants to go back to drill and spread himself a bit. You might even bait him with a special coach for the exams. Anything to hang onto him until we get a nice, fat mess fund built up."

"Beggin' the Cap'n's pardon," smiled the first sergeant, "but I'm not dumb enough that I didn't think of that same idea. I saw he was crazy to get a commission and I sure painted him a rosy picture of his chance here with H Company. He wasn't interested a-tall. All he says was, thanks, but Senator Blessingham was looking out for him."

"Did you show him that the best politicians are having a lot of hard luck in this war?"

"Sure I did, sir. I tries to tell him his angel might fuzzle out and leave him holdin' the sack. But he comes right back with a stony stare and says the Senator just simply wouldn't dare. I reckon, Cap'n, this bird Pilkington must really be some pumpkins back in his own home town."

"Well," concluded the captain, "let's hope for the best—and hang onto him as long as we can."

VI

ON A gloomy, battle-torn day of some three months later, a mystery of long standing—that of Corporal Johnston's prolonged absence—was cleared up very suddenly in Private Pilkington's unhappy mind. He came upon his erstwhile valet and handy man in the war-wrecked French village of Danziers-sur-Meuse. They nearly collided. Private Pilkington was moving to the rear at a dogtrot bearing a message back to the regimental P. C. which had been cut off from wire communication by persistent shell fire. Johnston was moving forward at a swift pace of thirty odd steps per minute to take his place in the line.

"Why, good morning, Pilkington," said Johnston cheerily. "You seem in a hurry."

The H Company K. P., now performing useful temporary service as company runner while the regiment took its baptism of fire, was startled into a gaping halt, not so much by the presence of the missing Johnston, as by the transformation that confronted his eyes. His mouth dropped open. Was this really Johnston? Straight as an arrow, level eyed, radiating energy and self-confidence, a poise and air of easy assurance as to the manner born. And on his shoulder there shone a narrow gold bar, a symbol of station that was unmistakable.

Lieutenant Johnston stared, too, at the transformation that stood before him. The firmness of the dull eyes was gone. There was a hint of wretchedness and growing demoralization written in those once proud features. The Pilkington arrogance was reduced to a mere sulk. Private Pilkington straightened and his hand moved towards the rim of his steel helmet in salute. Even as a mere K. P. refugee, awaiting commission, he had learned the outward forms of discipline in the seven months since Johnston had stood before him as his obsequious valet. He restrained his hand before it reached his hat and rubbed his cheek to cover up the gesture. Lieutenant Johnston ignored the affront.

"I'm on my way to headquarters with an important communication," Private Pilkington said in a voice that lent importance to his mission. He added in an accusing voice: "I see you've been pulling some wires on your own sweet account."

"Thank God, I haven't," replied Lieutenant Johnston. "I'm just reporting in from three months of hard work at the infantry school at Langres. Haven't you found out yet, Pilkington, that it's the load you pull and not the wires you pull that counts in any game outside pink tea and politics?"

"You speak well of yourself, Johnston," Pilkington retorted. "I seem to remember that you did not assert any of these superior qualities back at—Pittsburg."

"Only too true," smiled the lieutenant. "You make me blush for my past sins, Pilkington." He cast a whimsical glance at his wrist watch and went on: "It being now close to noon, I'd be pouring your morning bath at this minute back in—Pittsburg. That is if this war hadn't happened along to search out who's who, and why. As matters now stand, I might have you detailed to the officers' bath when the outfit drops back into a rest area."

"Cook Haggerty will see that no such outrage as that happens," Private Pilkington spoke up, suppressing a shudder. "It may interest you to learn, Johnston, that even the captain recognizes I am merely awaiting my commission."

"That's just the trouble," said Johnston. "You're always waiting. You might have your commission this minute if you had depended on yourself instead of laying back waiting for someone to serve it to you in bed—like you've been used to having things done for you all your life."

"I did not ask your advice," said Pilkington stiffly. "I'll be a—a first lieutenant over you yet, before this thing is ended—if—if I have to burn up the cables home."

"You might try burning up some useful energy instead," Johnston laughed after him good-humoredly as Private Pilkington went stamping on his way.

Even the grisly horrors and insufferable hardships of battle were swept from the Pilkington mind by the humiliation of this meeting with Johnston. It had been bad enough to see Pierre in the chevrons of headquarters mess sergeant, and Gunning a wagon train sergeant major. But this menial now an officer over him! He quickened his pace at the thought of a cabled ultimatum to Senator Blessingham. So far he had waited with some degree of patience while the Blessingham correspondence had piled up into a mere mountain of promises. Now this thing could go on no further. After all, it came to him, Johnston's promotion merely demonstrated what the Senator might accomplish if he really extended himself. He would force the issue as soon as he could get a cablegram off.

FIRED by this determination, he was speeding through a muddy, shell-torn swale over which H Company had advanced earlier, when a miracle far greater than any Senator Blessingham might ever hope to perform wrought itself before his distended eyes. The prostrate form of an Austrian officer, lying almost at his feet as he passed, emerged suddenly from the cold throes of death in battle. With a swift spring the Austrian was on his feet, his cocked pistol at Private Pilkington's side.

"Will you be so kind as to let me have your rifle?" the Austrian asked calmly in perfect English. The officer took the rifle with a polite "Thank you," and lowered his pistol.

"First, let me say that I have no wish to do you any harm," the Austrian reassured his prisoner. "I have merely a very small favor to ask of you—one which need put you to no great inconvenience."

"I'm—sorry—but I am in no position of authority here," Clarence managed to stammer, "I'm merely here waiting for my commission."

"Ah—then I deal with a gentleman of —responsibility," said the Austrian, brightening. "Permit me to explain my situation. I am Captain Baron von Hoogstraat. There are some forty of my good men who survived your attack this morning. It has been my hope that perhaps my division would return here in a counter-attack so that we could rejoin, but I see now that is quite impossible. I perceive it to be my duty to do the best thing for my men since we are stranded so far behind your front line. The majority of them are my own retainers from my estates in Austria and I do not want them needlessly sacrificed. Do I make myself clear now?"

"But—but what is there I can possibly do to help you?" Private Pilkington stammered his bewilderment. The officer's reference to his forty men brought the uneasy suspicion that the man had become demented in battle. There were no men in sight except the stone dead.

"My plan was this, sir," the captain replied. "I will form my men in column, disarmed, and you will escort us in safety to your collecting point for prisoners in the rear. Your presence behind us, bearing your rifle, will prevent us from being fired upon by some excitable rear element of your troops."

"But your men, sir? I have not seen such a company as you speak of," said the nervous Pilkington. "Are you quite well today?"

"Have I, then, your pledge that you will give us safe escort to the rear?" the Austrian pressed him.

"Why, yes, of course, if you—" Clarence faltered.

The officer lifted a wooden whistle to his lips and sounded three short shrill blasts. Sodden lumps of clay, twisted and uncanny evidence of the red savagery of war, stirred to life along the length and breadth of the swale and arose from the mud into living exponents of the superiority of Austrian battle wile. Another series of sharp whistle blasts and the resurrected war mannikins converged upon their astute leader. A sharp bark from his lips put them eight abreast in column immediately ahead of Private Pilkington.

Captain Baron von Hoogstraat, his warriors in formation and ready to march, turned to Private Pilkington.

"Your rifle, sir," he said with a slight bow as he returned the weapon to its owner. "We now commit ourselves to the honor of your protection."

What might have been a triumphal march back with this formidable bag was disturbed by an uneasy apprehension that grew upon the captor as to the consequences of this adventure. While it seemed the proper thing to favor the pleasant mannered and cultivated Austrian gentleman, the fear thrust itself upon Private Pilkington that his actions might bring upon him some unknown disciplinary wrath that might even jeopardize his forthcoming commission. His uneasiness was not allayed when the column ahead of him was halted by the occupants of a large olive drab limousine that appeared suddenly in their course.

He stood dumbly fearful as an elderly officer, accompanied by three others, climbed from the car and came bristling towards him.

"Where did you get these prisoners," the elderly man demanded.

Neither the officer's voice nor his manner were reassuring and Private Pilkington had not been in the service seven months even as a guest of the H Company kitchen, without learning awe of two stars on one shoulder.

"They asked me, sir—they merely wanted—" he began, floundering.

"May I presume to offer a word, sir?" the Austrian commander broke in anxiously, fearful lest the true facts, once officially known, make their way back to Austria after the war.

"Proceed," growled the general. "You, at least, appear to have a tongue to speak with."

"You Americans are so modest, sir," said Captain Baron von Hoogstraat. "This soldier caught us at a great disadvantage while we were in an open swale, sir. His fire was deadly, and he was in such cover that—well, sir, you may think it strange that we should surrender to one man—but I am certain that not one of us might have survived. This soldier is the most deadly marksman in battle I have ever met, and I did the only humane thing for my men. I surrendered with such of my men as survived."

The general turned to the soldier whose prowess and valor had received this glowing tribute from the vanquished enemy.

"That's the kind of spirit I like to see in my men," he exclaimed. "You are a credit to the training I have given in my division. What is your name and organization?"

"Pilkington, sir, with H Company."

"Put that down, Captain," the general instructed his aide. "Pilkington—Pilkington." He repeated the name as if it stirred some elusive memory. His face cleared in sudden recollection. "Not, by any chance, Clarence Reginald Pilkington of Pittsburg?"

"That is my name, sir," Private Pilkington replied, his pulse rising at this disclosure that he was known as his true self by someone in authority at last.

"There's a damn fool senator back home been pestering the life out of me trying to get us to do something for you," said the general. "I finally had to write and tell him frankly that our report was you weren't worth a damn for anything but K. P. duty."

"I—I don't understand, sir," Private Pilkington managed to protest. "I was only—only waiting—for——"

"But I suppose now," said the general, ignoring Pilkington, "I am compelled to write the senator that my information was altogether incorrect." The general closed the incident abruptly. "Private Pilkington, under my authority as a division commander in the field, I appoint you first lieutenant of infantry for demonstrated leadership on the field of battle. Your commission is effective at once, subject to later confirmation by general headquarters for assignment as soon as you have disposed of your prisoners!"

H COMPANY was licking its wounds in a rest area and filling its depleted ranks with enlisted replacements from St. Signan when an officer replacement, spic and span in a uniform that reeked of newness, sauntered into the first sergeant's quarters in an abandoned rabbitry.

"What the hell—?" began the first sergeant, only to break off in mid-sentence, click his heels together and raise his hand to his cap in salute. "I meant, good morning, sir," he corrected himself. "I did not see at first that your commission has finally arrived, Lieutenant Pilkington. Fact is, not seeing you of late, I thought you was gone A. W. O. L."

"I have been trying for some months," said Lieutenant Pilkington, severely, "to tell you I was merely awaiting the arrival of my commission."

"My mistake, sir," the sergeant confessed. "I've been in the service so long it's hard sometimes to tell me things that ain't easy on the imagination. I have to be shown—meanin' no disrespect at all to the lieutenant."

"I will take up my offical duties at once," Lieutenant Pilkington ordered. "Now you will be good enough to have that fellow Johnston report to me."

The first sergeant started, stared sharply at the lieutenant as if on the point of a sharp rejoinder, then replied respectfully.

"That's a matter, sir, you will have to take up with the cap'n. No first sergeant's got any right trying to give any orders to lieutenants."

"That," reflected the new lieutenant dryly, "is entirely as it should be. I can appreciate that it is better. I will attend to the matter personally."

He went at once to the Company P. C. which was set up in an ancient stone café. For two weeks, while he marked time at division headquarters awaiting this hour of joining the command, Lieutenant Pilkington had lived in anticipation of the moment when he would confront his upstart hireling with the costly error of discounting the house of Pilkington. To him, the incident of the prisoners meant only that it had brought him at last to the personal attention of the division commander and thus brought Senator Blessingham's request to a belated culmination. That final cable he was planning would have turned the trick, any way, he told himself.

As he sauntered into the company headquarters, Lieutenant Pilkington came suddenly upon the unsuspecting second lieutenant sitting there in his shirt sleeves, cooling his heels. He walked directly in front of Johnston and stood looking down at him with a taunting smile. To his amazement the junior officer displayed neither surprise nor dismay.

"I'm glad to see you, Pilkington," Johnston said with easy cordiality, keeping his seat. "I knew you'd make the grade once you got in and tried—although it did startle me the pace you went once you got started on the right track."

"The time has passed, Johnston," Lieutenant Pilkington said coolly, "when I have to accept your presumptuous chatter. I have been telling you that things would come out with me as they should. We shall see——"

"Why what's eating at you, Pilkington?" the other inquired, a sorely puzzled look mounting to his face. "I was really proud of the way you carried on after that last advice I gave you. That's the reason I offered to take you on down here for instruction until you learn your stuff. I hope you're going to justify my interest in you."

"Ah, so that's your idea now, is it?" Lieutenant Pilkington bantered him. "You're going to pose as my benefactor. Well, I chance to know something of the malicious reports that were made against me. Except for Senator Blessingham's insistence, I might——"

"Blessingham be hanged!" Johnston cut him off. "This is no time to be talking nonsense, Pilkington. Your situation is not a very happy one right this minute and you've a serious decision to make without any beating about the bush."

"Just what, Johnston, am I to understand by that remarkable statement?"

"It's just as well for you to know the whole thing," Johnston told him. "The division commander was impressed with your backbone and initiative. Who wouldn't be? But he appointed you on impulse and it wasn't until later, when they talked with you, that his staff found out such military education as you've had concerns potato knives instead of platoon command. Naturally, they didn't want to risk embarrassing the general by telling him he'd pulled a bloomer. The only thing left to do was send you to Blois and have you busted back to a private again—unless some company was willing to carry you attached for instruction until you could learn your stuff. That's where we stepped in and offered to take you off their hands. Now what I want to know is whether you're going to play the game and burn up some useful energy learning your stuff?"

"Naturally," said Lieutenant Pilkington, pulling himself together out of a long, staring silence, "naturally, since I have been given the commission for which I entered the service, I propose to demonstrate my fitness. But you——"

"Good," Johnston almost shouted. "I knew you'd found yourself, and you can count on me to help put you across a hundred per cent."

"One moment, Johnston," Lieutenant Pilkington spoke up, now remembering not merely his natural superiority but the superiority of his rank. "I've had quite enough of your patronizing insolence. Permit me to remind you that as a first lieutenant I accept my instruction from the captain, and not from my—inferiors."

"So that's what's biting you?" Johnston's words came with the sharpness of a lash. "Lieutenant Pilkington, permit me to inform you that you are addressing your captain!"

The new lieutenant's hand went slowly to the top of the captain's table for support. His eyes caught the shining double bars on the coat that hung from a peg on the wall, mute evidence of another promotion on the field—one that had come for pulling an infantry company through ten days of hell.

"Johnston, you—you mean you are now the—the captain here?" he gasped.

"I mean exactly that," replied Captain Johnston.

The DESERT BELL

Whose Tolling No Man Heard A Second Time

By ERNEST DOUGLAS

IT WAS at Altar that Shattuck and Caple first heard of the Desert Bell whose sepulchral chime was the voice of death. At the same time they were told that Lázaro Peralta was coming back after forty years to reclaim the mysterious hidden mine from which he had once dug a fortune so vast as to fire him with an ambition to rule not only Sonora but all of Mexico. They laughed, as is the way of gringos on hearing Mexican legends, and thought no more about it until they saw the cattle dying at *Rancho Escondido.*

That was when they were on their way back to civilization after Caple had convinced Shattuck that the copper claims upon which he had staked his hard-earned savings were worthless. Shattuck, who knew the country, was the one who suggested that they swerve a trifle out of their direct route and enjoy one night's respite from the hardships of the trail.

Caple had hoped to find a farm, an oasis in that grim land of cactus and sagebrush, but he was disappointed. Rancho Escondido was merely a cluster of adobe houses and pole corrals set against the foot of a high bluff which marked the boundary of an even dryer, more forbidding region known as *El Desierto Blanco*—the white desert.

Several motionless horsemen were bunched at the edge of a mesquite grove just outside the gate, and Shattuck recognized Erasmo Chacon. The lean, hawk-eyed, elderly cattleman and his *vaqueros* were watching half a dozen gaunt steers writhing in their death throes. Farther in among the trees were as many more, already dead.

"Greetings to you and yours, Don Erasmo," called Shattuck in the colloquial Spanish that he spoke like a native. "Allow me to present my friend, Señor Caple, a mining engineer. We wish to impose upon your hospitality for tonight."

"My house is your house," returned Chacon. His manner and words were cordial enough but his attention was on the suffering steers.

"What's the matter with the stock?" Shattuck inquired curiously. "Surely they didn't all get snake bitten at once. Have they been poisoned?"

"No. They have heard the Desert Bell."

"The Desert Bell?" This brought a smile to the handsome, bronzed face of the big Yankee. "Someone was telling us about it only the other day. But surely it isn't fatal to animals, only men."

"Peralta's curse spares no living creature," the Mexican replied seriously. "It is not the first time this has happened.

"You understand, my friends, that I ship my cattle to market from Yuma, up in Arizona. To avoid the long journey across *El Desierto Blanco* where there is no feed and no water except at Peralta's mine, we drive them around by way of Jicamonte and Camorri.

"But the pens at Yuma are old and sometimes the cattle escape before they are loaded on the cars. They always take the shortest way home, which is straight across the desert. It is much too far for them to travel without a drink, but the devil must tell them about the water at Peralta's. Or they smell it, or—well, a cow has instincts that no man can explain. Anyway, they hear the Desert Bell and so they die. Some of them do not even live until they reach the ranch."

Not until after the evening meal, when they were sitting in Don Erasmo's cool patio with cigarets between their lips and a bottle of wine on the table between them, did the Americans have an opportunity to inquire further regarding the singular story of the Desert Bell. Their host was not eager to talk about it, and some adroit questioning was required to bring out the details. Chacon did not know them at first hand because he had come to the district of Altar since the time of Peralta.

A wild, reckless young *caballero* that Lázaro Peralta had been, from all accounts. Not far from a bandit, and to dodge pursuit after some escapade he had been compelled to flee into the trackless, supposedly waterless *Desierto Blanco.* Somewhere in those wastes he had discovered a fabulously rich gold ledge.

Its exact location had never been made known to anyone except six or seven kindred spirits who helped him get out the gold. In fact, all others were forbidden the desert. Peralta hung a huge bronze bell—some said in a tree, some said in a tower erected for the purpose—and proclaimed that anyone who came within sound of it should die. Repeatedly he proved that this was no idle threat, until his name became a terror. Even then, supernatural powers were ascribed to him by the superstitious natives.

Wealth made Peralta a power in Sonora. He married into a good family and began to dabble in politics. Sycophants eager to spend his money in campaigning urged him to run for governor, but his dreams mounted even higher. He would head a revolutionary movement and become president.

His mining partners became his lieutenants. They spent most of their joint fortune in providing a small army with smuggled equipment. From a little town near Hermosillo, the state capital, the army started on what was to be a triumphal march to Mexico City.

But federal troops interfered. Peralta's forces were routed; he and his officers were captured and shot as traitors. There was some rumor that the leader had been spared and sent to the prison for political offenders on *Tres Marias* Island, but Chacon placed no credence in this. Peralta's wife and baby daughter dropped out of sight.

"But with Peralta dead and buried, how can he keep on killing anybody or anything that goes near his mine?" puzzled Shattuck.

"His bell is still there," explained Chacon. "When he left the last time he gave warning that whoever heard the bell should die just the same as though he were there himself. And they have all died, even to my poor cattle."

"You mean that people have gone out to that mine?"

"Many have gone in search of it, for no living man knows just where it lies. Those who did not find it were lucky, for those who did are dead."

"How do you know they are?"

"They never came back. A score at least have been claimed by the bell or perished of thirst when they did not find it. Sometimes their horses stray back, but they always die just like my steers."

CAPLE, the trim, blue eyed little geologist, smoked silently while Shattuck fired questions that Chacon was unable to answer regarding the probable distance to the lost ledge, the amount of gold it had yielded, and so on. The way Shattuck's thoughts were running was so apparent that the Mexican became alarmed and begged him to give up his rash notion of adding himself to the list of Peralta's posthumous victims.

"I am to blame for mentioning the bell to you," he mourned. "Why are you so eager to believe in the gold and to disbelieve in the peril that guards it? All gringos are at least a little mad, and now I shall lose the only one that I ever called friend."

"Nonsense, Don Erasmo." Shattuck chortled until his tall, well muscled body shook; his boyish eyes were alight with a lust that, Caple knew, was not so much for yellow metal as for adventure. "The bell hasn't been cast that can knock me out, even if Old Nick himself cracked me over the bean with it."

Shattuck drummed with his clenched fist on the table and grinned at Chacon, then at Caple. Don Erasmo was genuinely distressed, protested volubly; but all his arguments were swept aside.

"That is old woman talk," scouted the American. "I am surprised that you have not claimed the gold for yourself long before this.

"Now I hope that you will not mind if Señor Caple and I retire. Tomorrow will be a hard day for us."

When they were alone inside the low-ceiled bedroom to which Chacon's *mozo* escorted them, Shattuck turned and solemnly extended his hand. The grin was gone now but the gleam of elation had not left his eye.

"Are you on?" he demanded.

"Am I what?"

"Are you with me in this thing? I need a partner, one who knows more about mineralogy than I do. You're just the man."

"It will be quite a gamble, Sam."

"What isn't a gamble? I've been gambling all my life with my money or my skin, and the skin's all I've got left. Dropped my last stake in that copper prospect you just turned down. Now I'm out to make another in a hurry, a big one."

"That's all right for you, with only yourself to look out for. But I'm married, and——"

"There's no danger, the way I've got it planned. Not unless you believe that poppycock about the bell. We'll back trail those cattle—their tracks are still fresh. And we'll take along a couple of mules loaded with water cans. Turn the mules loose when the loads get light, and push on with the horses. Cache enough water to bring us out if we don't find any. Deserts aren't so bad if you just use your noodle."

"Let you know in the morning. Good night!"

But Caple, outwardly his usual calm and collected self, was inwardly seething with the same fever that inflamed Shattuck. He knew already that he was going in search of the Desert Bell. As he lay waiting for sleep to come his mind was phrasing the letters that he intended writing to his wife and to the employers who had sent him to see whether Shattuck's claims were worth buying and developing.

THE start was made at daylight the second day following, over Don Erasmo's almost tearful objections and to the horror of the pious folks of *Rancho Escondido*.

Up a steep, rocky trail they drove the heavily laden pack mules that Caple had bought from Chacon to complete their outfit. Just as morning blazed across the desert they reached the level mesa. To the north stretched barren mile after barren mile, all a creamy white stippled with purple buttes whose peaks were spear-points of sunrise gold.

There were a few scraggly greasewood bushes and shriveled chollas at first, and through the tracks of Chacon's stricken steers meandered erratically. Even Caple's unpracticed eye could discern where they had staggered, fallen, pawed about in the soft earth, then risen and struggled onward. A turkey buzzard with a hideous red head flapped sullenly away from the clean-picked bones of one that had failed to rise.

"Sam, what do you suppose really was the matter with those cattle?" queried Caple.

"Browsed on cactus, likely, and got their insides all scratched up. Or maybe Erasmo's right and a bell jangled 'em to death."

And then Shattuck boomed hilariously:

"That Desert Bell! That Desert Bell!
Full many a cow it sent to hell.
Whene'er she heard its clapper clap,
It knocked poor bossy off the map."

"Ugh! You're a rotten singer and a

worse poet, Sam. Say, I'm sweating already. This will be a roaring furnace by noon."

Caple was right. The white sands that had been so clean and pleasant in the early light soon became a blaring torture that seared their eyeballs. The buttes lost their amethystine haze and stood forth in all their stark, bony ugliness. Above, the sun was a caldron of fire radiating intolerable heat through the thin, clear atmosphere.

The mules lagged and the horses fought to get at the water cans. At midday a stop was made in the scant shade of a knoll, and a gallon or two of water was doled out to each thirsty beast.

Caple suggested that it might be a good idea to do their traveling at night. Shattuck, with more than a suspicion of acerbity in his tone, inquired how they were to follow cattle tracks by moonlight. Caple said nothing more; his nerves were also feeling the strain. The reality of *El Desierto Blanco*, with its pulsing heat that seemed determined to suck every drop of moisture from his tissues, was far worse than anything he had imagined.

He mentioned this to Shattuck, who said: "Yeah, this is a real desert. You're used to mesas, where there's at least greasewood and where you can cut into a niggerhead cactus if you're square up against it for water. Lot of difference."

They plodded on through an incredibly long afternoon. There was no change in the character of the landscape: just white sand interspersed with those knobs of splintered stone. And hot! hot! *hot!*

When Caple lay down that night the earth's stored heat boiled up through his single blanket to scorch his skin. He could hear the horses and mules champing and stamping around the stump of an ironwood tree that had long ago given up the unequal struggle for existence in that arid spot. It was plain to him that Shattuck had underestimated the minimum of water necessary to sustain life in the desert, and overestimated the speed they would be able to make. He doubted if they had covered thirty miles.

Shattuck admitted this as they talked together in the ghostly half light that preceded the dawn. "Got to keep the horses in fair shape, for success and maybe our lives depend on them now. But no more water for the jugheads. Maybe it was a mistake to bring 'em along; a quick dash might have been our best bet. But we'll keep 'em with us one more day and start 'em back tonight, if we don't find the mine by then. Load 'em with gold if we do."

Progress was even slower that day, for they lost the trail in a sea of flinty stones that lay like a black scar across the face of the desert. On the far side, when they came to the sand again, they cut for tracks first to the right, then retraced their weary steps and finally located the hoofprints just before dusk.

In the meantime the forty gallons of water with which they had left *Rancho Escondido* had shrunk to three five gallon cans, plus what Shattuck and Caple had in their canteens. They unsaddled at the foot of a butte, set the cans by a projecting ledge, and attempted to shoo the mules toward home.

But the thirst tormented brutes stubbornly refused to go. Again and again they dashed past Shattuck and Caple toward the cans. Finally, however, a shower of stones and curses drove them out of sight around the butte. The gold seekers returned from the chase with parched tongues and so utterly spent that when they had sparingly watered themselves and their horses they dropped in a stupor of exhaustion.

Caple awoke with a pleasant breeze fanning his blistered cheeks. For a moment he lay gazing up at the brilliant moon. Then the sky was obscured by a gust of sand-laden wind. An instant later he leaped to his feet, stood choking and swaying in the grip of a desert sandstorm.

He seized his blanket, just in time to save it, and wrapped it about his head that he might breathe after a fashion. As from afar came the frantic yell of Sam Shattuck: "Up, man, *up!*"

Obediently Caple charged up the side of the butte. It was not more than fifty feet high, but the wind up there carried little sand. Silently they watched the dark billows eddy and swirl below them.

"It won't last long," said Shattuck. "Mean's our grub's full of grit. Feel sorry for the ponies, but there wasn't any time —hey? What's that?"

Caple could hear nothing save the roar of the storm. Then came a lull, and with it some dull, thumping noises from the direction of their camp.

"Those dad-blasted mules!" howled Shattuck as he bounded down the slope.

The gale was fast subsiding as Caple followed. He found his partner standing disconsolate over the battered remnants of their three water cans. About them was a damp circle. The crafty mules that had broken them open with their sharp hoofs, and drunk what precious liquid had not wasted upon the earth, were disappearing into the gloom, headed south.

"No use crying over spilt milk, I guess," said Shattuck with a rueful laugh. "How about your canteen?"

"About half full."

"So's mine. That means a gallon between us. Well——"

"Sam!" cried Caple. "Are those our horses with the mules. Look!"

The moonlight was now as bright as before the storm. It disclosed not two, but four animals moving rapidly into the distance, all of a mile away.

Shattuck ran to the needles of granite where they had left the ponies tied. Nothing was there save two frayed ends of rope.

"They got scared in the storm," he said blankly. "Reared back and broke their ropes. Why didn't I think? Lord, what a bonehead! What a bonehead! And I thought I knew something about desert travel. Here, give me that canteen."

Caple wonderingly complied. Shattuck poured carefully from the mouth of his own canteen into the other, until the geologist's was full.

"Here, you take this and hit for the ranch. Better go right now."

"What's the idea? What do you—?"

"You can make it. No use of you dying out here because of my folly."

"I don't see where you get any license to shoulder all the blame. I'll go if you go."

"Not enough water for both. Besides, I'll find Peralta's mine tomorrow."

"But all the tracks are blown away."

"Yes, but it can't be much farther. I've got a pint or so to see me through. Go on, you fool."

"Sam, I joined with you in this venture for better or worse. I'm telling you straight that I'd rather take my chances here with you than tackle the back trail alone."

Shattuck looked at Caple long and earnestly, then thrust out his hand. "You mean it, that's plain. You look like a tenderfoot, but you're more man than I am—a lot more."

They salvaged their jerked beef and bread and Shattuck strapped on his revolver. With nothing to guide them save a knowledge of the general strike of the now obliterated cattle tracks, they tramped northward.

SUNRISE found them footsore, almost at the point of collapse, but still determined. No trace of old mine workings had been seen. Occasionally they listened, hoping desperately to hear a bell clang through the deathly stillness, although they realized that if the Desert Bell ever existed it had probably tumbled to earth years before.

They began to look about for some place to hole up for the day, agreeing that henceforth their search must be prosecuted in the comparative coolness of night. Both knew that in all probability there would not be more than another night for them, two at most.

Shattuck stopped short and stared agape across an unbroken plain of sand. Caple rubbed his eyes. "Mirage!" he muttered.

A mile, perhaps two miles, to the northwest were a horse and rider, moving along at a snail's pace.

"We'll soon find out whether it's a mirage," snorted Shattuck as his revolver cracked.

The horse stopped. A second human figure, afoot, became dimly visible at its head.

"Real!" exclaimed Shattuck. "Come on. Maybe there's a ranch out here that Chacon never heard about."

Now the other party turned and made toward them. Shattuck and Caple hurried forward breathlessly.

The person on foot broke away from the horse to run ahead. It was a woman, a girl with a tattered khaki skirt and high crowned Mexican sombrero.

"*Agua!*" she implored. "For the mercy of God, señores, gives me water. My grandfather is near to death."

Shattuck nodded assent and Caple placed the full canteen in her outstretched hand. She ran back and passed it up to the horseman, who drank greedily.

"Not too fast! Not too fast!" cautioned Shattuck, jerking the canteen away. "This is all we have, except for a pint more.

Here, señorita, you look as though a mouthful wouldn't do you any harm."

She drank a few swallows. "*Mil gracias*, señores! You have saved our lives. We can make it now to——"

"Hold your tongue, Felipa," growled the man on the horse.

He was an ancient, pitifully shriveled mite of humanity, bony as the starved, faltering crowbait that he rode. A single yellow fang was left in his shrunken gums and it was set over the lower lip in a menacing snarl. The deeply creased face bristled with short white whiskers. But the most repulsive features of that evil countenance were the protruding eyeballs, ghastly blue in color and stone blind.

"If you mean that you can make it to some place where there's water, we're going along," Shattuck asserted. "You can't shake us off."

Rage convulsed the blind man's face. "No!" he shrieked. "Be on your way, gringos. Go! This is my country."

"Your country?" exploded Shattuck. "Say, what do you think you are? You——"

He checked himself, smote his left palm with his right fist.

"I've got it now. You're Peralta. Remember, Caple? That *cantinero* at Altar told us Peralta was out of the penitentiary and coming back to his mine. I thought he was talking through his hat, but he had the straight dope from somewhere."

"I am Lázaro Peralta." There was lordly pride in the tone and the prison-worn wreck who had once ruled *El Desierto Blanco* tried to pull himself erect in the saddle.

Shattuck turned to the girl. "Your pardon, miss, but who the devil are you? Where do you edge into the picture?"

"Do not answer him, tell him nothing," shrilled Peralta, waving his hands in agitation. But she ignored him.

"I am Felipa Mendivil, señor. His granddaughter and the only relative left alive when he was released. He went blind in prison, as you see, so he could not come back to his mine alone. There was no one else he could trust and he promised to make me rich if I would help him. I had no idea it would be such a terrible journey or I would never have come.

"We started with two horses. Mine fell into a hole yesterday and broke a leg, so we had to leave it. Our water gave out last night. We have suffered much, both of us."

"That's easy enough to believe. Señor Caple and I thought we had stood some hardship—but a blind man with one foot in the grave, and a woman. Whew!"

"It may be a lucky thing for all of us, running together like this. We have a little water left and you know the way to where we all wish to go. Lead on."

"Show you the way to my mine?" foamed Peralta. "Never! Go away. Attend to your own business and leave us alone."

"But, grandfather, they saved our lives by sharing their water with us. We need help and they are lost, so——"

"They seek Peralta's gold. They shall not have it. It is mine! Mine!"

A torrent of abuse flowed from his lips, so foul that the girl shuddered and covered her ears.

She was uncommonly pretty, Caple had already noticed, with a troubled smile that was strangely winning and appealing. Her arms were firm and well rounded, her teeth pearly white. Glowing black eyes begged mutely for sympathy and understanding. He guessed that her skin, now lined with fatigue and powdered with the fine desert dust, must be a rich, tropical olive.

"Look here, old-timer, you might as well save your breath," Shattuck advised when Peralta's tirade slowed down. "We don't care about intruding where we're not wanted, but we've got to have water pronto. You know where it is, so we're going to trail along whether you like it or not. You needn't be afraid we'll steal anything that belongs to you."

Peralta leered defiantly, then a cunning smile overspread his face.

"Very well, but remember that it means death to hear the bell of Peralta. When you knock at the gates of hell, do not say that I failed to warn you. I am old and feeble and blind, but I am still Peralta. Felipa, come here."

She stood at his stirrup while he bent down and whispered something. "No! No!" she protested. "Not that."

With a hand that was like the claw of a vulture he grasped her shoulder. "You do as I say. Remember, not a word. Go ahead."

She took the reins, pulled the horse

around and headed northwest again. With one hand she beckoned to the Yankees.

"Poor old bird is plumb loco," sighed Shattuck as they trudged behind. "I hope they're not off the route. It's just too bad for all of us if they are."

EVERY few minutes a halt would be made while Felipa minutely described the nearby buttes and a chain of connected hills that had appeared off to their right. The course was shifted a little farther to the west, and the odd procession forged sluggishly on across sands which were now splotched with leprous patches of alkaline earth crusted with salt.

Once Shattuck hurried up and almost forced the stumbling girl to drink again from his canteen. He did not offer it to Peralta, who was mumbling and laughing horribly to himself.

"Have you any idea how much farther it is?" he asked.

"Only a little way if—if——"

"If he really remembers the landmarks he thinks he recognizes through your eyes."

"I believe he does. His mind is very clear on most things. Listen!"

She held up her hand. All strained their ears but could hear only the labored panting of the horse.

Shattuck hurried off a few yards and stopped again to listen intently. The sunburned face that he turned to them was alight with joy and relief.

"I hear it. A bell!"

"You hear Peralta's bell? Aha! Then you shall be the next of my enemies to die."

"Enemies? What in the world makes you fancy that we're enemies? Didn't we—?"

The girl silenced him with a gesture.

"Excuse me," he murmured. "We're all so miserably dry we don't know what we're doing. Let's go on. Oh, for a good drink!"

"Yes," cackled Peralta. "A good drink. Be sure to take a good drink. Felipa, is there a hill to our left with a stone on the side that sticks up like a thumb crooked at the end?"

"We are right beside it, grandfather."

"Then we leave the horse here. Help me off."

"Leave the horse?" Shattuck and Caple were astounded. "Why should you walk now? And doesn't the poor old plug need a drink, too? Sure looks like it."

"Better humor him, señores. Please! Please!"

A cleft was found between two boulders where there would be shade at least part of the day, and the horse was tied up there. Then the journey was resumed. With the aid of a short staff, and Felipa guiding him by the arm, Peralta hobbled ahead. The Yankees were surprised at the vigor still left in the shrunken old body.

"Madre de dios!"

The girl leaped aside. Almost at her feet was a grinning human skull at the end of a string of disintegrating bones.

"Qué es eso, Felipa?"

"A skeleton. It frightens me."

"Someone who has heard Peralta's bell. *Vaya!*"

Suddenly the earth opened up before them. They gazed out over a wide, shallow, rock-strewn valley that was absolutely barren of vegetation. In the center, not more than a mile away, were three or four dots that Caple took to be stone houses in an advanced state of decay. A little farther on was a narrow ribbon of silver that reflected the sunlight like a polished mirror.

"Water! There it is. We're all set now."

A faint breeze stirred. To their ears came a metallic clang, loud and clear.

"Here, take this canteen," said Shattuck. "Drink all there is, for we're safe now. I'll go ahead with the other one and bring it back, full, just as fast as these legs will carry me."

Already he was hurrying down the broken slope. With a terrified cry, Felipa Mendivil dashed after him and seized his arm.

"No! No! Do not drink that water, Señor Shattuck. It is poison."

"Felipa! Oh, you traitress! I am betrayed by my own granddaughter, the only one of my flesh left this side of hell. And all for two gringo thieves."

Peralta foamed and cursed as he whirled his staff about him in impotent fury. Caple scampered out of reach and stood looking on foolishly.

"I—I don't get this at all," stammered Shattuck. "You say that water is poison?"

"Yes. It is death to drink it, sometimes almost at once and sometimes not for several days. He told me to say nothing but to let you drink it and die, so that we would be rid of both of you. But I—could not.

"He is not wicked, señor; just old and childish and perhaps mad from brooding in solitary confinement."

"I'll say he is! Now we know why Chacon's cattle died, and everyone who heard the Desert Bell. Peralta's curse is only a poison spring. And he insisted on leaving the horse so it wouldn't stampede as soon as it saw the water. But—what is he expecting to drink himself out here in this desert? How are you to live?"

"There is good water somewhere about, but it is hidden."

"O-ho! The two of you were to watch us snuff out, then help yourselves to the *aqua pura*. What a beautiful murder plot! And it would have worked like a charm, only you wouldn't throw in with him. Much obliged, señorita. That was—was—quite a favor.

"Well, now we know what to do. Your little plan has miscarried, Don Lázaro. You may as well come on and show us the other spring, or well, or whatever it is."

"Never! Peralta's gold is for Peralta or no one. We'll all die together now."

"Oh, I guess not. If you don't show us at once, you will as soon as you get good and thirsty again. And if you don't, we'll find it anyway."

Shattuck wrested Peralta's stick away and set him on his feet. The blind man lapsed into morose silence. He offered no resistance when Felipa took hold of his arm and urged him on.

SLOWLY the thread of still water drew nearer. At length they passed the tumble-down shacks, built of flat stones, where Peralta and his partners had once lived. The only one that was at all whole was a stubby tower apparently constructed a little more solidly than the others. Through jagged apertures near the unroofed apex they glimpsed a battered, greenish bell that was now silent.

A hundred yards to the east was a small waste dump before the dark mouth of a tunnel that bored into a red-brown ridge. This, of course, was the gold mine; but gold did not interest them just then.

They stood on the brink of a tiny, sluggish stream that rose from a gravel bed, spread out over a strip not over a quarter of an acre in extent, and then disappeared. In the mud about the margin were cattle tracks not many days old.

"Looks clear enough, doesn't it?" said Shattuck with a click of his drying tongue.

"Too clear," replied Caple. "Not a bug or a minnow or a sprig of moss in it. Looks as deadly as a cyanide solution. But we'd never have noticed that if we hadn't been warned."

"I'll say we wouldn't. Even when I know what it is I can hardly keep my nose out of it.

"Well, Don Lázaro, what about the other water supply. Which way from here?"

Peralta emitted a squeal of derisive laughter. "Drink, gringos. Here is clear, sweet water. Why hesitate? Go ahead and enjoy yourselves. It will be the last you'll get."

"Oh no, it isn't. We have some left in the canteens—enough to keep the three of us alive for a couple of days if we stay in the shade and don't exert ourselves too much. There'll be none for you. And no food."

"Peralta is old. There is little juice in his tissues, and he needs little. He is like a lizard and will be here when you are roasting in Satan's deepest pit with the others who sneered at the Desert Bell."

"Hear! Hear! You talk like the titles of a moving picture. But what about your granddaughter?"

Peralta cast his staff aside and waved clenched fists aloft. His whole body quivered and Caple fancied that the slaty blue of the sightless eyeballs was now tinged with scarlet.

"Let her die with her gringo friends. She has played me false."

"And when we are all gone you'll die yourself, even if you find good water. On the other hand, if you'll be reasonable we can get you out of the desert alive. What is your stubbornness going to gain you?"

"Vengeance! What more is left for me? I meant to go back and revenge myself on the fiends that caged me like a beast and tortured me and starved me and refused to get a doctor for me when I was going blind. But it is too late now. I am too old and weak, and I have not even the eyes of one whom I can trust. I will be stronger and see better after I am dead."

Peralta maundered on incoherently. "Come on, Sam," urged Caple. "Can't you see that he's absolutely obsessed with that revenge mania? We'll find his well. He and his miners must have had water from somewhere."

"That's right. Señorita, have you any idea where it can be?"

"No, he never dropped a hint."

"Well, you keep watch over him while we look about."

Naturally they made first for the tunnel. Caple went ahead into the somber darkness, striking matches as he stumbled along the uneven floor.

Only a few steps took him to the end. There was not a sign of moisture.

"We're sure in the wrong place," remarked Shattuck. "Let's look farther up the gulch."

"All right." Caple struck another match. "Say, Sam, it looks——"

"Looks like what?"

"See? The vein here pinched down to a knife-blade seam. This was only a pocket of ore and they dug it all out. Of course I can't be sure without a thorough examination, but that's the way it appears to me."

"There has to be some more somewhere. What else could he have come back for?"

"And how did he expect to do any mining with only a girl to help him? They're also without either tools or dynamite, you notice."

"My opinion is that he came back just because of a whim to die on the spot where he won his wealth. Or maybe he forgot that the mine was worked out. It makes no difference what his idea was, for he's a raving madman now."

"Think so? I wish I could tell how much is craziness and how much pure cussedness. If I knew it was cussedness I'd throw him down and press hot coals against his feet until he told us where to find water."

"Torture wouldn't have any effect. He'd let you kill him by inches before he would tell. All we can do is keep on hunting."

They looked through the ramshackle huts, gave the bell tower a close inspection, and roamed through a miniature "Garden of the Gods," a tract of fantastically carved granite boulders that lay a little farther up the valley. Here they were momentarily encouraged by clumps of coarse *galleta* grass growing in the deeper crevices. But there was no well, no spring, not the slightest indication of water except the poison pool.

BY THIS time it was noon and the thirst of the searchers was a well-nigh unbearable torment. They moistened their swelling tongues and returned to where Felipa Mendivil and her grandfather reclined in the shadow of one of the ancient walls. She refused the canteen that Shattuck proffered.

"We cannot take any more of your water. I would never have asked your help if I had dreamed what was going to happen."

Shattuck coaxed her into the tunnel, where it was slightly cooler. Caple withdrew to the breast, tried to sleep, and finally succeeded in dozing off.

When he awoke the forms of Shattuck and Felipa were outlined against the late afternoon light at the portal. Her hands were in his and their faces were very close together.

"Don't you let that worry you for a minute, little girl. You saved our lives, didn't you? Even if we'd never met you we'd have found this place, and by now we'd be as dead as that fellow we saw up there on the mesa."

Caple smiled sadly. "Evidently we have a love affair," he thought. "With Death in the rôle of Cupid."

Felipa yielded to Shattuck's entreaties and accepted a spoonful of tepid water that he poured into the stopper of his canteen. He and Caple drank the same allowance, and each of the three munched a slice of bread from their almost microscopic provision supply.

Peralta was still stretched out on the ground with his sombrero over his face. Felipa approached him and spoke gently, asking him how he fared, only to be driven away with another storm of abuse.

The three of them joined in another search for the hidden water that continued until the darkness that preceded moonrise. Their only discovery was another skeleton out in the granite.

Somehow the night dragged by. They all slept fitfully. When dawn came, Shattuck was staring with red rimmed, hate darkened eyes at the recumbent and motionless Peralta, who apparently had not stirred.

"And to think that all of us have to die just because of a kink in that old lunatic's brain," he grumbled, unaware that he was overheard. "Caple, who would be home with his wife now if I hadn't dragged him out here. Felipa and me, right after we've found each other. I'd love to put my heel on that buzzard head and squash it."

Peralta sat up, adjusted his rawhide sandals, fumbled for his staff and limped off, feeling his way along the wall toward a doorway.

"He looks like a corpse, but there's more life in him than there is in me," commented Caple.

"Ah, mi abuelo pobre!" grieved Felipa, tears furrowing down her dusty cheeks. "He must be so thirsty. And he is only a *loco* with a sick mind."

Shattuck gazed at her strangely. Then he snatched up a canteen and shook it. A very little water sloshed inside.

"You're right, girl. Sick, that's what he is. No more responsible than a baby. He shares with the rest of us from now on. We'll just pass out a little sooner, that's all."

He strode to Peralta, who was now shuffling among the débris within one of the huts.

"Here, Don Lázaro. Here is water for you. Not much, but all we can spare."

Peralta cut at him viciously with the staff. "Damn you and your water!" he screamed. "You think to poison Peralta."

"No, no, grandfather. It is good water that Señor Shattuck offers. Oh, why must you treat such an unselfish friend as an enemy?"

"Go away. Let me alone. Don't try any of your gringo tricks on me."

They left him, of course. Shattuck sat down and stared for a long time at his toes.

"I don't savvy it," he declared. "Now he hasn't had a drop to drink, as far as we know, since yesterday morning; yet he's as lively as a grasshoper. How come?"

"Old and juiceless, just as he says," hazarded Caple.

"But he was certainly bad off for water yesterday."

"He suffered a great deal from thirst," affirmed Felipa. "Always he was urging me to hurry."

"Then he had water. We ought to have watched him through the night. I wonder if he has been drinking from the pond—just the same as we'll be doing in a day or so when we lose our senses."

The ground between Peralta's sleeping place and the lagoon was soft, and a cursory examination disclosed no sandal tracks leading in that direction. In all other directions the soil was more firmly packed. Shattuck dropped to his hands and knees and slowly made a semi-circle.

With a repressed shout he leaped to his feet and went charging past the mine dump. Caple and Felipa followed eagerly. She pointed to certain marks on the earth that might have been made by Peralta's staff.

At the edge of the granite boulders Shattuck paused and looked ahead blankly. For there the trail ended. There was not a scratch on those hard blocks to indicate the route of the maniac's nocturnal stroll.

"But there has to be water somewhere up here," he argued. "We know it now. No matter how well he remembers the lay of the land, he couldn't have traveled more than a few hundred yards without getting lost. We'll find it now, easy."

Events proved him a false prophet. All forenoon they prowled and climbed over the hundred acres or so covered by the granite—for there were no tracks beyond. Every cavity and cranny was explored. Again and again they went over every square yard until they were reeling from exhaustion and the world was a maze of dancing heat waves before their smarting eyes.

"No use," Shattuck finally admitted. "Let's go back to our tunnel. Don't let him know we suspect anything, but watch him tonight. He's sure to go for another drink."

They drank the last of their water. It was scarcely more than a teaser, a bit of wetness that but intensified their maddening thirst.

With glazing eyes Caple stared toward the still, lifeless pond. Boiling though the shallow water must be in that cruel sunlight, he longed desperately to throw himself in the wallow luxuriously, to swill gallons of that blessed moisture and soak gallons more through his parched skin. Tomorrow, he realized, he would be doing just that. For he now took no stock whatever in Shattuck's optimistic theory that Peralta had groped his way to some spring of good water that remained hidden to them. It was obvious that no such spring existed.

The surface of the pool was rippled by a vagrant breeze. The bell began to toll mournfully, the first time they had heard it since their arrival.

"Ya-h-h-h-h! Hear it! Whoever hears the Desert Bell shall die. Do you believe it now? Do you believe?"

Peralta, in his old place by the wall, gibbered and chattered interminably with nobody paying him attention.

All he said was true, Caple reasoned dully. They might as well end their misery by drinking the poison water now. Before they perished they would know at least a few hours of surcease from this excruciating punishment.

With this in mind he started to leave the tunnel. Shattuck, sensing his intention, shoved him back roughly. Caple fell and lay smoldering with resentment; yet it did not seem worth while to try to rise.

A sound that made him think of rustling autumn leaves came to his ears. It was Felipa, sobbing softly in Shattuck's arms while he murmured endearments that came thickly past his swollen, blackened lips.

Without, the Desert Bell dingdonged hollowly, spasmodically, eerily, as though haunted by the spirits of those who had died after hearing its ghostly voice.

CAPLE'S next sensation was of someone shaking him vigorously by the shoulder. Drugged with pain, he strove to fight off this enemy who would prod him on to fresh tortures of renewed physical exertion.

"Get up, mate," Shattuck was whispering hoarsely. "Foxy Grandpa is on his way."

With a mighty effort of the will, Caple pulled himself together and lurched out into the murky night. He was dimly aware of Shattuck and Felipa standing by him.

Remembrance of the pond, with its abundance of moisture that was at least wet even if deadly, penetrated to his numbed consciousness and he floundered in that direction. But a firm hand turned him around and marched him eastward.

"Hear him? Listen!"

He heard the soft *shush-shush* of sandals dragging over stone, punctuated by the scrape of a wooden stick being set down to help its owner hobble painfully along.

One luminous edge of the moon's disc swam above the horizon. In its streaming beams the humped figure of Lázaro Peralta was outlined clearly two hundred yards away.

The watchers caught their breath, dug finger nails into their palms as Peralta felt his way forward.

He stood beside a boulder that jutted a little higher than the rest, and felt of it as though assuring himself of his whereabouts. Then he disappeared.

Clutched by the fear that they would lose him altogether, Caple started forward; but Shattuck jerked him back.

"Not so fast. If he hears you—if he even suspects that we're onto him—it's all off."

Shattuck himself moved warily ahead after a time, motioning the others to follow. They circled the granite cone behind which Peralta had vanished.

He was not in sight.

"'S all right. We'll hear him again in a minute. Or he'll be coming back. But he seemed to be headed straight into the moon. Come on."

"What's this?"

Caple was pointing to a dark hole in the side of another boulder a few steps farther on.

"Just a cave."

"I don't remember it."

They inched nearer. With a wild leap of the heart Caple saw that a thin slab, which had appeared to be an integral part of the larger rock, had been shifted to one side. From the opening thus revealed floated a breath of air that was delightfully cool and laden with dampness.

"Here he comes."

Peralta scrambled out of the subterranean blackness. For a moment he leaned tremulously on his staff, wiping his lips with the back of his hand; then he reached for the slab to roll it back into place.

"Never mind, *amigo*. We'll close the gate when we're through."

A full minute must have past while Peralta stood as though paralyzed. With a yelp of demoniac fury he hurled himself toward Shattuck, bringing his staff down on the American's forearm with all the strength left in his puny frame. Shattuck caught the stick and, in wrenching it away, broke it. He tossed the pieces from him.

"Better dive in there and have a drink, Felipa. You too, Caple."

She stood aside but Caple pushed her in ahead of him.

A light zephyr stirred from the southwest, just enough to set the bell to ringing faintly.

"The bell! The bell! Even Peralta's bell has played him false."

Sobbing like a broken-hearted babe, and waving his arms over his head, he ran frantically toward the tower.

"He'll stumble and break his neck," Caple predicted.

"Don't give a hoot if he does. Felipa—"

She emerged into the moonlight, smiling radiantly. "Good water! Oh, so good!"

"You next, boy. Not too much at first. You're in bad shape."

Caple made no protest. In a moment his face was buried in a glorious pool scooped out of the gravel underneath the granite boulder. In a second all his agony left him, to be succeeded by a drowsy sense of relief and complete well-being.

From these delights he was rudely hauled away by the ankles. "Didn't I tell you to be careful at the start. Give me a chance, can't you?"

Shattuck brought out his old felt hat full of the water. They splashed it over each other, laughing like little children. Then Caple filled his hat, not once but a dozen times, until they were sodden and dripping.

"Oh, I am so hungry!" exclaimed Felipa. "A little while ago I could think of nothing but water and now I can think of nothing but food. And we have so little."

"Enough for a few square meals, at any rate," Shattuck chuckled. "This way to banquet hall."

Voraciously they wolfed stale bread and jerky until their hunger was in part appeased. As they ate the breeze freshened until the bell was pealing briskly.

"Ring on, you old hearse gong!" roared Shattuck. "That's music in my ears. You sounded like a funeral knell this morning, but now you sound like a— a——"

"Wedding bell," prompted Caple mischievously.

"You bet!" agreed Shattuck; but Felipa Mendivil turned her face away in embarrassment.

"By the way, I wonder where your granddad went to. I feel amiable enough now to throw him a crust. And maybe, since all his lovely plans blew up on him, he'll tell us where to find whatever it is he came back to get."

"Why, isn't this his mine?" asked the girl.

"It is—or was; but the mine isn't what he was after. No more ore here, Caple says. He didn't speak of anything else to you?"

"No; he really told me very little, only that there is much wealth here still."

"Then we'll find it. First, though, we've got to find him."

Peralta was not about the ruins. They searched around for several minutes before one of them noticed a dark object out in the middle of the poison pond.

"Well, what do you know about that!" ejaculated Shattuck.

As he spoke Peralta lowered his head and drank deeply, deliberately.

"Suicide! Can you beat it? Well, I guess it won't hurt me any to wade in it."

Shattuck dashed in and carried Peralta to shore. The old man squirmed and fought and screeched maledictions until he was dropped bodily on the earth. There he seemed to subside into a stupor, and lay moaning.

"I don't suppose there's a thing we can do for him," Shattuck said helplessly.

"Not a thing, I'd say," Caple concurred. "And I doubt if it would be any kindness to him if we could.

"But there's one thing we're forgetting —that horse."

"That's right. It will be a big help to us in getting back across the desert. If it's still alive, that is."

"I'll fill both canteens and go up to see. Let it drink out of my hat."

Broad daylight had come when Caple returned with the tottering pony. He gave the beast all the water it could drink, cut it an armful of galleta grass, and rejoined his companions.

Shattuck and Felipa knelt beside the still prostrate and unconscious Peralta. His drawn face was strained with tears.

"Yes, he came to his senses just once," Shattuck reported. "And say, I half believe he realized that he had got completely off on the wrong track and had made himself a lot of unnecessary trouble. He kept groaning something that sounded like *Perdona me*, and hanging on to Felipa's hand like he was asking her to forgive him. Then he seemed to be trying to tell us something about '*el oro*'—the gold—but he was too weak to get it out."

And then occurred what Caple ever after

declared was the strangest incident of that whole affair of the Desert Bell.

THE morning air was absolutely motionless. Above, the deeply blue sky was already taking on the hard, burnished tinge of day in the desert. The sun was rising in an appalling splendor of livid fire. There was no more wind, at least on the ground level, than had the earth and the sky and the far horizon been the walls of a stupendous vacuum.

Yet the Desert Bell began to jangle, not gently but loudly, continuously and insistently, as though shaken by some anxious unseen hand.

The sound seemed to penetrate to Peralta's torpid brain. His body was convulsed by an acute spasm.

"Hear it! Peralta's bell! Go, my friends, go!"

"By the Old Harry, I will go!" Shattuck sprang to his feet. "I've heard enough of that funeral music. It'll drive me off my nut if I have to listen to it any longer."

Before Caple fathomed what he intended doing, Shattuck was inside the crumbling tower and had started to swarm upward. Caple and Felipa watched him open-mouthed as he nimbly found footholds between the loosely fitted flat blocks.

"Be careful, Sam. That's dangerous climbing."

"Oh, please! Please come down," pleaded Felipa. "You will yet die by the bell. I have a feeling—here!"

Shattuck's only reply was a boisterous laugh. He was almost to the top now, thirty feet above their heads.

The bell swung from the eye of a huge rusty bolt which pierced a mesquite log that had its ends buried in opposite walls of the tower. Across this beam Shattuck threw his arm, rested his weight thereon.

The aged log dissolved into splinters and powder.

Down swooshed the bell, to smash into fragments upon a boulder at Caple's feet.

Caple and the girl dodged backward, just in time to miss an avalanche of stone. A thick cloud of dust set them to sneezing and momentarily blinded them.

When their vision cleared they saw that the upper third of the tower had distintegrated. A few of the stones had fallen outward but most of them had slid down to the floor inside the tower, in a heap of rubbish.

And somewhere in the heap was Sam Shattuck!

"Oh, he is killed! I have lost him after all."

"Now, he's all right," Caple soothed, voicing a confidence that he was far from feeling. "I don't believe you could kill that blamed fool with a carload of dynamite."

A pair of putteed legs projected from the débris. He laid hold and pulled, but to no avail. Then they clawed desperately at the stony mass until their fingers were raw and bleading. Felipa was breathing in short, panting sobs.

One of the fragments felt strangely heavy in Caple's hand. A glance told him that it was a small, almost square metal ingot that gleamed yellow in the morning light.

He threw it to one side and chucked several more with it before they were finally able to drag Shattuck free.

The young prospector's clothes were torn to shreds; he was bruised and cut in a thousand places; but he breathed and apparently there were no broken bones.

Felipa Mendivil hysterically threw herself upon her lover's breast and kissed him again and again until her lips were crimson with his blood.

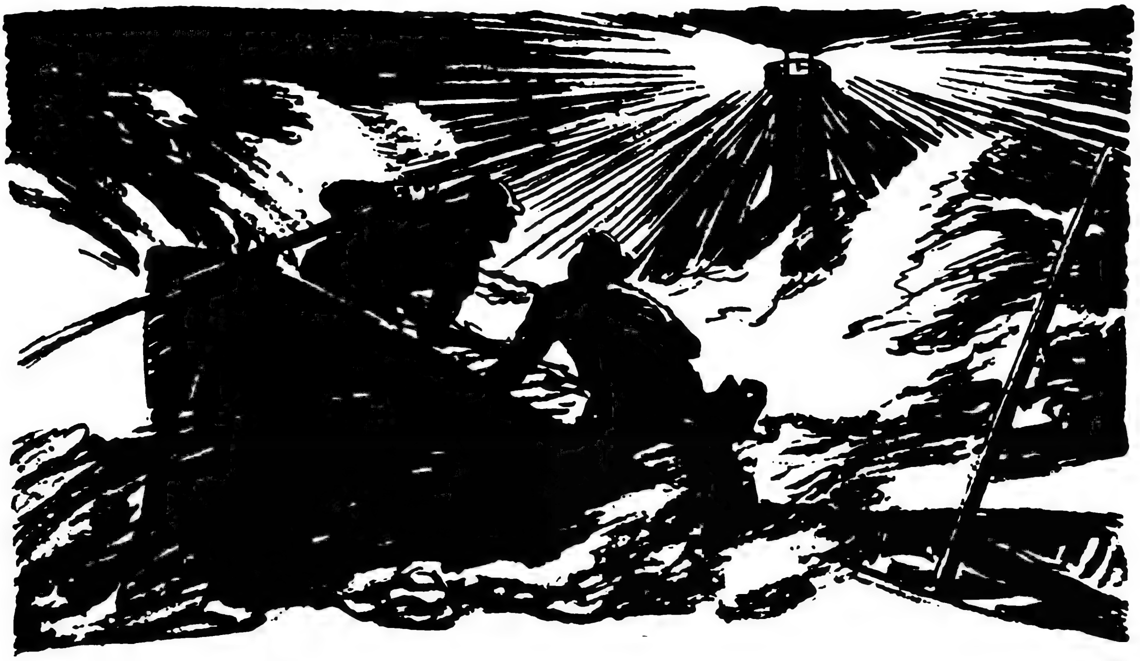
Shattuck's eyes fluttered open, met Caple's. He winked.

"Not so bad! Not so bad!"

Caple merely smiled in reply. The news of the cache of gold bars, now scattered among the wreckage of the tower, would keep for a few minutes.

He stepped over to the side of the sick man. Lázaro Peralta was dead.

When the Storms Sweep in off the Wide Atlantic



The LIGHT *on* LITTLE HOPE

By CAPTAIN DINGLE

TWO rough-clad, lean, sinewy fishermen slouched over a deal table before a roaring driftwood fire in a stout shack on the beach. The landlord, a decent law evader who somehow contrived to supply his patrons with warmth-giving refreshment, glanced furtively at them as if he wanted very much to be rid of them yet scarcely dared to act. Other seafarers were there. They too watched without ostentation, expectant.

The two men played with dice. Each bore marks of recent battle. Each appeared likely to break out into warfare again at any moment. Every roll of the dice brought heavy breathing, fierce glances, unspoken threats. A hot word was spoken. The landlord hurried forward:

"Have a shot on the house, boys. Have a leetle snort on me. It's blowin' like all fury outside, ain't it? Jumbo! Listen to that wind!"

The men laughed unpleasantly. They were halfway to their feet, faces almost touching. They were rough, unshaven faces, tanned and wind lined; yet not ugly faces. Joe Tagg might have been handsome with a little personal care, or even wish. Frank Burney was hewn in ruggeder mold, but his was a strong face too. Just now passion swayed them. The table quivered under their hands' stress.

Then the door opened. A swirl of sand and a tang of weed came in on a blast of wind. The flashing beam of Little Hope Light swept the blackness in the instant before the door was slammed shut. A man stood with his back to the closed door, panting, wiping streaming eyes, dripping salt water from glistening oilskin and overflowing boots.

"That plague ship anchored in quarantine ground is dragging!" he got out at last. Every man in the shack started. The imminent fight was forgotten.

"Ashore?" snapped Burney. Ruddy faces looked whiter.

"Seems to be dragging t'wards the Ledges," the man gasped, choking anew on a scorching snort pressed upon him by the landlord.

"Hell! That needn't worry us," growled

Tagg, and sat at the table again. Other men, encouraged by the broken suspense, sat in the game. Numbers made for peace this time.

Tagg and Burney were old antagonists; rivals in business, boyhood foes, and one time they had been rivals in love. At first their antagonism had been fierce without being bitter. They fought as boys, and as youths, and into manhood too, with no rancor, no aftermath of brooding resentment. Sometimes one would win, then the other. Only when Jean Arkell appeared on the scene did the balance swing definitely. Then it swung towards Joe. Joe appeared to be favored by Jean. Not much, for she knew enough to withhold her final word until she knew her mind. But everybody knew Joe had the edge over Frank. And they fought over it, just as they fought over almost everything that came between them. Joe won oftener after Jean came. And Frank began to grow bitter. The bitterness was reflected in Joe, because of the new, ugly element it brought into their association.

Each owned his own fishing boat and gear. Alongshore fishing was good. With one hand along on shares a boat could make a fair living for the owner. People had begun to guess at the date when Joe and Jean would hook up. For of course it was to be Joe. Didn't he whip Frank, before all the village, so badly that Frank hid for three days? He saw Jean after that, full of pride and bound to tie her down to a day. But Jean said no.

"I can't marry a man who cannot control himself, Joe," she said. "I saw the fight. It was shameful."

Joe left, boiling with anger. Jean went to see Frank, and tended his hurts. People talked more. She was going to marry Frank out of pity! She fooled them all. One day she went away. And her aunt, with whom she had lived at the shore, would only tell that she had returned home to her people.

Now, not a month before the gale that threatened to wreck the plague ship, came the news that the new keeper of the Light on Little Hope had taken a woman out with him; more, that woman was Jean. The news fanned afresh the smoldering enmity between Joe and Frank. It had broken out in fight yesterday. It had threatened all the day of the storm, when no fisherman dare leave the beach. It was at pitch when the door opened and let in the newsbearer.

"The light tender had to come back today, too," that thawing individual volunteered presently. "Couldn't land the lighthouse stores. Must be getting pretty short out there. One boat got 'most alongside, and capsized in the surf. Hell's b'iling along them Ledges tonight."

"Do 'em good to want awhile!" growled Frank. He felt vindictive. Jean might have been sure of her stores by marrying him.

"That's a dirty way to talk," said Joe quietly, looking directly into Frank's eyes. Frank laughed. Usually he flew into a passion when Joe spoke in that quiet tone.

"S'pose you take a load o' stores to 'em," he said. "You got a good boat."

"Ain't nobody could make that trip tonight!" the landlord stated. Trade was getting brisk. If any boat started out, all hands would troop downshore to watch. That was no good for him.

"I'd go in a minute if my boat was off the ways," Frank put in carelessly. He avoided Joe's glances. Joe went on with the game. The shack quivered to the storm. Pebbles pinged against the walls; at intervals, growing more frequent as the gale increased, sheets of upflung water deluged the roof, poured down the chimney and started the blazing logs crackling. The flames leaped to the terrific draft; blue, yellow, red.

THE game was finished. Men drew from the table. Some went to the fire, others peered through slits in the window shutters to seaward. One married man struggled into his slicker. He was going home. And as he buttoned up, a different sound seeped in through all the uproar of the wind and sea. It was not an unfamiliar sound. Many a time had it been heard on that coast.

"Rocket!" snapped a man. They crowded the door. A few wind-blown stars were still falling across the blackness. Another thin, wavery streak crossed the sky. It burst, and other stars fell.

"That ship's among the Ledges!" shouted the first bearer of news. "She's 'most onto the light!"

"And full o' crazy coolies rotten with plague!" cried Joe, on his feet, his face set in sudden realization and abject horror.

"If I had my boat!" Frank said, with an ugly half laugh, still avoiding even glancing at Joe. Nobody there misunderstood Frank, least of all Joe.

"If you had your boat you'd keep your mouth shut good and tight about boats," snapped Joe.

"Mean to say I'd be scared to go off?" fired back Frank.

"Scared stiff! You're a bladder o' wind."

Men fell endways, all ways, as Joe and Frank clashed on the driven sand. Because there was another matter of interest, and because there was no real cause, or any time, for fighting, it was a fierce, vindictive conflict. Frank pitched to earth under a heavy jolt that split his eyebrow and blinded him with blood. Infuriated, he stuck out his seaboot and tripped Joe, leaping up and kicking his foe while on the ground. That was something new. Never before had unfair fighting crept in between the ancient antagonists. And the foul kick was noticed, for all the uproar and divided interest. Men dared to get between them and stop the fight. Joe was angry enough to want to kill Frank; but another rocket soared aloft across the distant surges; the village doctor edged into the group with anxious inquiry; and Joe turned to look and answer, wiping the blood from his booted lips. Frank lurked in the shack kitchen, trying to close his split eyebrow with raw liquor that tortured him.

"There's need for me out there," the doctor was saying. He was old; and little, and as he uttered the brave words his teeth gleamed between his thin lips. A great spirit dwelt in that puny body. "Could I get to the Light?" he asked with a shiver. The spray flew in sheets; lanterns shone on glistening oilskins. The doctor had no slicker; his city raincoat was drenched.

"That's no place for you, Doc," growled Joe. It was no place for any man, and well Joe knew it. The seas rolled into the little cove behind the shack with a thunderous roar and a devilish crash. It was fifty-fifty about a stout motor craft getting outside. The odds were two to one that she would be rolled over before winning clear of the beach surf. There was one chance in five that she might survive as far as the Ledges; and a slim one in ten that she stayed afloat long enough to land a man. The chances of getting anybody off the Light were scarcely one in a hundred. That was what Joe knew, why he was silent for a moment after answering the doctor.

"What could you do out there?" he wanted to know.

The doctor's teeth gleamed again. "Not much, it's true. Isolate those not yet infected, perhaps; I might save some lives."

All very courageous, very hopeless. Joe doubted whether the doctor would survive the mere trip out, even if it could be accomplished. But the old gentleman even thinking of such a thing—and Joe knew it was no empty bluff—was like a whip of scorpions to a strong man. There was a chance of making the trip; slight, but still a chance; and there was a slighter chance that if a boat got out there, and made to leeward of the Light, it might be able to take off the light keeper and his wife, leaving the rock and the tower to the poor plague stricken wretches from the wrecked ship.

Against all this was the stark fact that if a man won the gamble and reached the light, he stood to lose by the ghastly medium of plague. And Joe said, "Why should I?" Because Frank had taunted him? Because the old doctor yammered about going out? Jean was out there, truly. But what had he to do with her? Let her own man take care of her. If she were *his* wife he'd show the world!

But Frank's words rankled. Puttering about the beach were several old fishermen who realized the grimness of the situation out on the Ledges, and retained enough grit out of the lusty years of their lives to feel ashamed because they dared to do nothing now.

"Mebbe Joe 'ud leave us take his boat," muttered one sixty-year-old. He shivered as the doctor did. Age had chilled his blood. But Joe heard him, and glared. And Joe swore, blazingly.

"You're an old fool!" he growled, but he avoided the old man's eye as he said it. And he thrust through the crowd impetuously, going towards his boat. The old man shuffled at his heels, the sand and the gale making heavy going for his sea-booted old feet.

"Mebbe we kin make it, Joe," he gasped.

Joe swore again.

"We! Go home to bed, old fool! This is a job for a man!"

"I kin help, Joe. Steer, mebbe, whilst you tends th' engine."

"Help me run the boat afloat, then stand clear," growled Joe.

THERE were plenty of men to help launch a boat. The shack keeper trotted down with a jug of corn liquor. The doctor was at Joe's elbow with a pocket kit of medicines, telling Joe what to administer, and Joe never hearing a word. But the old fisherman was stubborn. He lifted a lame old leg over the gunwale when the boat was afloat and Joe crouched over the motor. He took a lantern from another man and fiddled futilely with the small sail, tying a reef in it in case it were needed. Men stood by, waiting for Joe to say the word to give the boat a flying shove. The motor exploded, coughed, stopped, and at the next try started.

"Shove her out!" yelled Joe, and they hunched their shoulders.

An upheaval among the crowd; a pair of long arms; the old man hauled ashore squealing; and Frank, lurching and cursing, fell into the boat as the motor took hold and Joe headed her into the screaming seas.

"Get to blazes ashore out of this!" yelled Joe, reaching for his enemy.

Frank shrank back, laughing harshly. "Tend to your job!" he shouted. "You can't hog all the glory."

Joe was mad enough to leave the tiller. He would throw Frank into the surf. The boat swerved as she met the incoming breakers, and Joe's hand was not there to steady her. She broached, half filled, and the motor sputtered. Frank shouldered his way aft.

"Want to drown both of us?" he roared. "Try and chuck me overboard after we get clear. Tend the motor. I'll steer."

Necessity forced compliance. The boat rolled hazardously in the terrific seas near the beach. Joe found his hands full keeping the motor going. That first drenching almost put the batteries out of business. Cylinders missed. Some of Joe's wiring was not so good.

The men on the shore watched the boat crash through the last breaker and gain open water. Then, but for fleeting glimpses of ghostly sprays upflung by her plunging bow, Joe's boat went from sight. Frank steered. He could do that well, as well as Joe. No bluff about Frank's seamanship. And he faced the black terror out there in the open as unflinchingly as Joe. Joe bent over the engine, shielding the ignition from the drenching seas. No fine modern motor launch was that. The fishermen had not yet reached that peak of affluence. Just a stout, seaworthy, rugged open boat, Joe's was, with a rugged two cylinder motor, set in the open, and a short mast carrying a small mainsail and jib.

The seas crashed aboard every minute. Joe pulled off the water inlet pipe, after turning off the valve, and stuck it down in the bilges, letting the motor suck it through the circulating system and overboard. That was an emergency measure too, not so good for the engine. But even that was insufficient. Joe took the bucket and bailed, while Frank steered and grinned.

"Going out to show Jean what a man she lost," jeered Frank.

A sea rose up, smashed against the bow, and rolled the boat down until water poured over the rail a foot deep. Joe was hurled to the bottom boards, gripping the hot motor and saving himself from a worse fall at cost of a burn. He was spitting salt water; he had heard Frank's jibe, and it stung. When that old man's senile burst of courage shamed Joe into starting towards his boat, Jean had been out of his mind. Sheer manhood impelled him, that alone. He stumbled to his feet, cursing Frank under his breath, promising dire things. But the motor needed him. The terrific upheavals of the boat made the fuel supply irregular. Watching the tortured seas all around them, Joe feared already for his boat's survival. No time for fighting. Frank was saying something; all the time talking; and Joe knew it was no praise he uttered.

"Wouldn't ask me to come along," shouted Frank, knees bent, bracing himself to the tiller stress. "Knowed my boat was out of commission, else I'd offered first." The boat sheered down the slope of a steep sea, swerved, and met the strength of the blast at the next crest. She quivered, almost stopped dead. "Had to be Joe Tag the hero!" rasped Frank.

The boat failed to lift to that crest. It broke, half filled the boat, the motor stopped, another sea roared down, and Frank and Joe were hurled together in mad tangle on top of the dead machine. Joe fought to his feet, spitting brine, half drowned, to curse Frank for a windy lubber. Frank lay still, his head in the swooping water. And the seas exulted.

"Get up!" yelled Joe, snatching at the tiller, trying to hold the boat's head to the seas. Frank lay quiet. A dizzy lurch flung him off the motor; he lay where he fell. And lightning flashed. It revealed Frank's white face, blood bathed.

Joe peered into the shrieking chaos all about. Little Hope Light sent out its warning rhythmically. Clockwork did that. He tried to make out the Ledges. Tried to make out the wreck. The Light was yet two miles away, and in between leaped uncontrolled fury. Water swashed knee deep in the boat. Frank would drown. Both would drown if the boat could not be handled. Only one thing: sail.

THE old fisherman had tied his reef. That was what skilled old fingers did, in spite of age. Joe found it well done. The boat might bear that bit of sail, even in such a blow. The water must be got out; but first the boat must be under management. Joe groped for the gear, hoisted the tiny sail, crawled to the tiller again and took the knockdown of the first gust in the canvas. The sail held. Then the boat was brought to the wind, the tiller lashed, holding her hove-to, perilously because of her water burden. Muttering in his agonizing labor, Joe dragged Frank to the stern, dropping him on the thwart. Frank lived. His breath hissed through bloody froth.

Joe bailed. Bailed as man never bailed before. Daring all, his strong legs braced between motor and boat's side, he swung his bucket, brimming every heave, flung the water out. The seas knocked the boat off her balance; the sail rattled. Joe turned with a curse. He had work enough. Frank had taken the tiller, hanging over it, doubled up, but bringing the boat back to bow the seas. Joe finished the bailing. Then he took the tiller from Frank's cold hands.

"Got some ribs busted," hissed Frank, lumping in a heap again.

"Lay still, then," growled Joe, ungraciously. He sought for the light, found it, and began to sail his staggering craft towards it again.

Frank had no doubt saved the boat from disaster; doubtless at the cost of dire agony; but Joe was in no mood to concede anything. He had not asked Frank to come. And Frank had said things, nasty things, while he was whole and unhurt. Let him lie and sweat now. Joe could sail his boat. He sailed her, with the true hand of a natural born seaman; and the Light was nearer. Once the water was out of the boat, and she was soaring on wings of sail instead of being punished by a devil of iron and gasoline, she labored less, took the seas more kindly, took less water, and made progress.

Not that it ever became easy. Each fathom was gained with heart and lungs and sinew and grit. And as the Ledges came near the seas gained in fiendishness through being broken up by the ragged rock bottom. Still Joe could see nothing of the wreck. It was Frank who saw it first.

"There's a mast, or something, and the surf's just b'iling!" he shouted hoarsely. Then he laughed, croaked, gasped. "Better turn and run! Can't make it! Only give Jean a couple more stiffs to bury, if we ever hit the rock!"

Joe gritted his teeth and steered. He edged too near the breakers; half filled the boat again in the broken water. Ran her wide, bailed, and edged in again. Beyond that fury of white water and black fangs of rock there would be a tiny eddy of lee, where the sea would not be breaking. If he could only win that! He saw his sail split at the clew. A lost sail spelled death. Daring all, he luffed, fought with the snatching sail until he tied a knot in the canvas itself and replaced the sheet. The boat had lost ground in that few moments. He started over again, fighting, fathom by fathom, his face lashed by the stinging spray. And he won back, almost to the lee he sought.

The boat suddenly leaped through a roaring comber, slid into smoother water, and Joe tacked towards the black loom of the Ledge. She nosed into the ebon gloom succeeding a flash of the light; next moment she crashed against the rock, the mast came down, snapped short, and Joe fell under the sail, knocked down by the spar. He struggled clear, dazed, feeling a queer pain in his knee; Frank was hanging half in, half out of the boat, groaning, breath hissing; trying with every fiber in him to make his fingers hold their clutch on a slippery edge of rock, while the boat surged madly on the backwash of the seas.

It was humanly impossible. The boat burst away. Frank fell towards the sea, and Joe dragged him aboard. There were lighted windows in the lighthouse living-rooms. A lantern swung wildly against the open door of the store shed. Black figures moved, seemed to dance, against the light of the lantern, figures moved across the lighted windows. And the swinging beam of the light swept its rhythmic path around the forbidding coast and the tumbling waters. Joe and Frank had seen all that could be seen.

"People from the wreck!" gasped Joe, feeling his knee, wondering why it no longer supported him.

"The plague's here!" hissed Frank, through red froth, cursing the thing that seemed stuck through his lungs.

BOTH men wondered why their boat was not immediately rushed by the wrecked unfortunates. There was but one answer. They had not been seen. Nobody could possibly expect a boat to attempt the mad passage from shore. Meanwhile Joe stuck out his only remaining resource, the long sweep at the stern, and sculled desperately. The boat's bows swung seaward in spite of him. That damaged knee. It robbed him of half his strength.

"Get the knife and cut that broken gear adrift! It's dragging her head around," panted Joe. The sea and the air were cold. The pain in his knee made him sweat. He kept his eyes on the Ledge, knowing that Frank had crawled forward to obey. The wheezing of Frank's breath told him.

The boat won to the lee of the rock again, and Joe lurched ashore, carrying the line. He dragged one leg behind him. The boat floated away to the end of the rope while he was tying it to a crag. Then he started up the rocks, bound to make that lighthouse door.

Frank screamed from the boat:

"Joe! Don't leave me here! Joe! If you leave me—you know I can't help myself—Joe! Blast you, Joe!"

Joe turned, and now it was he who grinned. Frank had taunted him once too often.

"Scared, hey? Thought you was mostly wind!" Joe was really shrieking. The words barely reached Frank above the gale. But he did hear. He heard every word, above the shrill of wind, the crash of windward seas, the deafening thud of heavy timber somewhere near by.

"Stay there. I'll bring the folks down. No need for you to risk getting plague," Joe yelped. "If they rush you, cut adrift."

Then Frank yelped even louder:

"You crazy fool! Who's scared o' plague? Joe! Joe! Blast you, Joe, don't let me skulk here while you go to them folks! Joe! I give you best. Don't let me be shamed before Jean's man!"

Something in the appeal, words or tone, or it may have been only the setting, or Joe's own feelings, carried the force of a sharp blow. It stopped Joe. The wrenched knee had hindered him; but it could never stop him. It was the unexpected nature of Frank's insistence on coming that stopped him.

In the blackness now Joe could see Frank in the bow of the boat, groping blindly for the rope. He could never reach that. It was made fast to a ring in the stem, outside, and there was no boathook. And Frank could never climb those rocks, even if he got the rope and pulled the boat near enough to land.

"Hold on! You'll go overboard," Joe bawled, and scrambled to the water's edge again. "If you'd rather die of plague than drown, I'm no spoilsport!" That was their way with each other always.

Up the rugged incline they dragged, drenched at every step with flying water. That made no difference; they were as wet as men could get before they landed. But the heavy sprays hit them, and staggered them. Joe could only hobble on one good leg and a useless one. Frank's legs were all right, but his ribs were stove in, and he had lost blood from a battered head. Joe's arm about him wrung gasps of agony from him; but Frank's legs had to carry them, and they must grin and bear.

"Hold up!" Frank gritted when Joe would have pitched forward. "No use getting this far and goin' to sleep!"

"What's wrong with *your* legs? I thought 'twas your ribs as was aching a bit," Joe spat back.

The rocks grew steeper. Their breath seemed to clog in their pipes as the men shuffled forward. Strange that nobody saw them. The Ledge must be swarming with frenzied wretches. What if they had rushed the lighthouse?

"'Twas Jean that made you take the chance, wasn't it, Joe?" Frank panted.

"Can't never have loved her if we wouldn't help her in trouble," growled Joe, getting ready to start again.

"That's right, Joe. Don't make no difference her taking the man she wanted," Frank returned, settling Joe's arm about his shoulder. And as they tottered upward: "I knew all along it wasn't me as was the man for her, Joe. I only played against you out of old habit. But I sure thought it was you she'd take, if she took any man."

And Joe, after three yards more of torture:

"Wasn't right not to visit them. Wasn't friendly. Just because another man won a prize is no reason we should be dogs!"

"We'll—visit—'em—after—this!" sobbed Frank, and with a last desperate effort they won to the open door of the store shed; saw a crowd of whirling black figures start describing crazy circles about them, and pitched forward at the feet of the light keeper and Jean.

IN A WARM room they opened their eyes again. Joe first, then Frank. They lay on cots in the store shed, and somebody held a lantern to each still face until the eyes fluttered. Outside the gale howled. The shed quivered to the shock of the seas against the Ledge. Joe and Frank gazed up into the circling faces, puzzled. No plague-crazed natives here; but weather-beaten white faces, serious faces truly, but clean and healthy.

And here came Jean. Jean and her man. She had seen Joe's eyelids quiver, then Frank's, and her face was alight with joy. Her eyes were misty and soft; her lips soft and quivery.

"Oh, father, they'll get well, won't they?" cried Jean, eagerly.

"More than they deserve!" grumbled the light keeper, keenly scrutinizing Joe's bewildered face. "Madmen! Coming off here in a gale like this! What did you think you could do?" he demanded.

"Didn't the plague ship strike on the Ledge?" gasped Joe, in a swallow of scalding broth. "Thought we might take you and Jean off."

The light keeper looked at the weather-beaten faces around, and queerly astonished glances passed.

"Oh, and you took such a chance!" breathed Jean. She darted a look at the keeper. "Father, did you hear?"

Joe heard that word "father" this time. The first time she uttered it he had been slowly coming out of a swoon. He caught her hand.

"I—we—everybody thought 'twas your husband!" he whispered.

"Oh!" She colored.

The keeper regarded Joe more queerly.

"Then you're both crazier than I thought," he said gruffly, his eyes not matching his tone by many shades. "Taking a chance on getting drowned or the plague or both for another man's wife. Thought you said neither of 'em was worth bothering about, Jean?"

"I never said any such thing!" Jean retorted. She turned to Joe again, perhaps to hide her face from the others. "The plague ship was towed inside by the Coast Guard steamer when she began to drag," she said. "These poor fellows are the crew of a schooner that struck a while ago. The gale's moderating. It'll be all over by morning, Joe, then you can get to a doctor. Poor Frank, too. I'll go see how he is."

"Wait!" whispered Joe, holding her back.

"More broth?" she asked, in sweet surprise.

"Broth be boiled!" he growled. "Are you going to live here always, Jean?"

"Well, perhaps not for ever and ever. But Frank wants something." She did not pull very hard.

"Frank can wait a second for what *he* wants. Don't waste time, then he won't wait so long. How long are you going to live on this Light?"

"Well——"

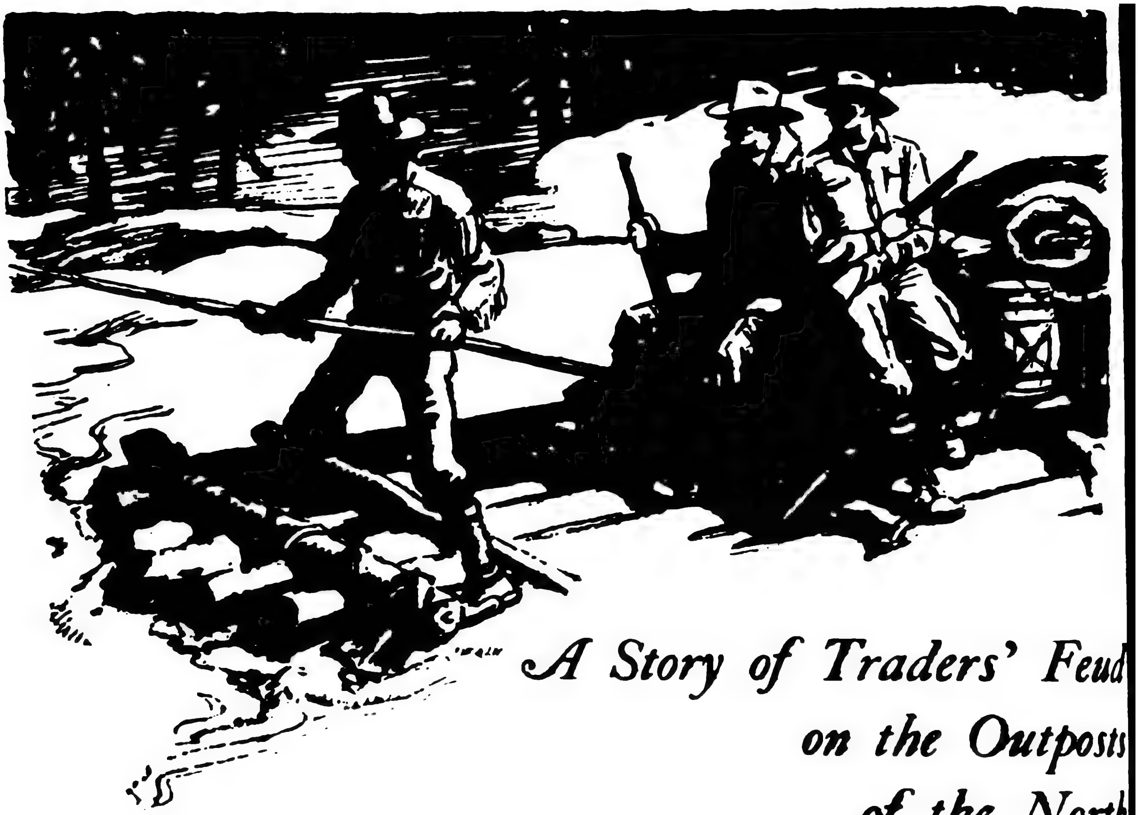
"Never mind well!"

"Well, father's getting married next month when he gets his relief; and I thought I'd stay a while with Aunt again. Then I remembered there's too much squabbling alongshore, so——"

"You go see what Frank wants!" grinned Joe. "Squabbling's all past and done with. I'll call at Aunty's first evening after your dad's relieved."

"Bring Frank, then," she insisted, perversely.

"If he'll come," promised Joe, seriously enough.



A Story of Traders' Feud on the Outposts of the North

I HAD just won the Dartrey case, and was at somewhat of a loose end. Having been forced to the conclusion that both plaintiffs and defendants in that famous case were a set of rascals, I was feeling disgusted with civilized life in general, and with the practice of the law in particular. This was my state of mind when Ralph Barnhill was shown into my office. Ralph is the son of my first pal, now dead. I had not seen him in three years since he had come to bid me goodby upon the occasion of starting into the North to take service with John Gault, the famous free trader of Fort Good Hope. The young fellow's rough clothes and the vigor expressed in his high color and clear eye seemed to bring a breath of that romantic country into my commonplace office. I experienced a decided pang of envy when I considered his life and mine.

"Welcome to town!" I cried.

Notwithstanding his abounding health, my young friend was in a gloomy temper. "Thanks, Mr. Lynn," he said gratefully. "Certainly feels good to find somebody who's glad to see you."

"How are things at Fort Good Hope?" I asked.

"John Gault has fired me," he said bitterly.

"What for?" I asked in surprise.

"He's a scoundrel!" he said, scowling darkly.

"I don't doubt it," I said cheerfully. "Sit down and tell me all about it."

He seated himself and accepted a cigaret, but in response to my request for details, only wagged his big hand back and forth. "I better keep off my personal grievances," he said with a grin, "or I'd never be able to let up." He took a long breath like one who nerves himself to face a crisis, and went on with manly bluntness: "Mr. Lynn, I'm not one to beat around the bush. I came to you to ask if you had a few thousand dollars that wasn't working. I want to buy a trading outfit and go back and fight John Gault on his own ground."

The suddenness and the boldness of the proposal took my breath away. "But, Good Lord!" I cried, "they tell me John Gault enjoys an absolute monopoly of the trade in that country; they say he has entrenched himself so strongly that even the Company keeps out."

"It's true," said Ralph. "Nobody

A Complete Novelette

NORTH *of* NOWHERE

By HULBERT FOOTNER

knows better than me how completely he's got it sewed up. Understand, I'm not asking you to risk your money on the long chance of breaking him. I ask you to lend it to me, at any proper rate of interest. If I lose it I'll work it off. I am young and strong."

His candor charmed me. As soon as he admitted it was risky, I began to think there must be something in it. Such is human psychology. In order to try him out a little, I affected to shake my head, saying, "Such a proposition doesn't appeal to me." The poor lad's face fell absurdly. "But," I added, "if somebody was to offer me a share outright in such an adventure, I might consider it."

He beamed again. "Certainly is decent of you, Mr. Wynn. But you haven't any idea what the outfit would be up against. I've got to tell you. Fort Good Hope is at the farthest point of the wide swing made by the Spirit River before it turns east to join the Mackenzie. Beyond it, all is unexplored. John Gault has been settled there for more than thirty years. His nearest neighbors on the one side are the posts at Spirit River Crossing, three hundred miles upstream. On the other side, the posts on Lake Miwasa are only about two hundred miles away, but there is no communication in that direction because navigation in the river is interrupted below Fort Good Hope. Many years ago John Gault discovered that wheat could be grown at his post, and he has gradually built up a settlement of breed farmers there. From this wheat grown on the spot he can grind flour at a price nobody else can touch. That's why they have to leave him alone. He has grown rich on it."

"How do you propose to meet this difficulty?" I asked.

"By carrying in a little process mill to grind the wheat," he answered. "I couldn't transport engine and boiler to run it, but I've been to the ministry of public works and have secured the grant of a little water power in the neighborhood."

"Good!" I said.

"That's only the first difficulty," he continued. "The main thing will be to persuade the breeds to sell me their wheat. They're all in John Gault's debt, and he has them terrorized. However, they know me. They know I'm on the square. I have hopes of persuading them to come in with me. By God," he cried with flashing eyes, "if I can get hold of their grain I'll have John Gault where I want him! He'll have to come to me, then."

The quality of passion in the young man's voice suggested to me that there was something more than a mere commercial proposition in this situation. It teased my curiosity.

"It doesn't seem to be the chance of profit that attracts you so much as getting back at John Gault," I remarked.

He jumped up and started pacing the room in his eagerness.

"Listen, Mr. Lynn. Those poor devils of breeds up there are forced to sell their wheat to John Gault at his price, see? In return they have to buy everything in the world that they use from him—at his price. John Gault then takes the flour that he grinds from their wheat and trades it with the Indians—at his price, in exchange for their furs—at his price again. Thus he makes four profits on every transaction. Is it any wonder that he has grown rich? He keeps them poor, breeds and Indians alike; he keeps them in slavery, the slavery of debt. That is the rotten scheme that I want to break up."

This was fine, and I had no doubt but that he meant every word of it, still, there was a personal passion in it that persuaded me I had not yet heard the whole story.

"Has John Gault a daughter?" I slyly ventured.

"No," he said in surprise. "He has no acknowledged children. He's a bachelor. Why do you ask?"

I parried the question with another. "Are there any white women at Fort Good Hope?"

By the deep blush which overspread his face I knew that I had stumbled upon the true explanation. "Yes," he said with a transparent pretence of indifference. "There is one. It is Miss Mary Cranleigh. She is the sister of Reverend Edward Cranleigh, a missionary who was sent in last fall to work among the Indians."

"Young?"

"A mere girl."

"And John Gault," I suggested smiling, "has aspirations in that direction?"

He looked at me and perceived that I had penetrated his secret. He spread out his hands in token of surrender. "Yes," he said, grinding his teeth, "the old scoundrel dies his hair and rattles his false teeth to persuade the world that he is young. He tries to dazzle the girl with his big house, his steamboat on the river, his electric light plant, his sawmill, his flour mill, and God knows what all." He struck his fist into his palm. "And yet I believe—I believe I had a chance there, Mr. Lynn. I believe that is the real reason I was fired!"

When I looked at the handsome lad in the pride of his strength I could believe it myself.

"Now you know why I have to go back," he went on. "You see it's entirely a personal matter. That's why I can't let you risk your money on the result. But if you would lend it to me. . . ."

I WAS already sold on the proposition. Coming at a moment when I was sick of the city and all its works, I couldn't help myself. However, since I was a lawyer I had to make believe to have some prudence, so I held off for a time while we went into an exhaustive discussion of the details of the enterprise. During the long journey out he had had nothing else to do but plan it, and I found him prepared for me at every point. He was no mere lovesick swain whose wish was the father of his thought. He had a good hard head on him. I thought the girl would be lucky who got him. In short, the scheme looked good to me, and finally I said, "Here's my proposition: I put up the money that is required, and we go fifty-fifty on all profits or losses."

He flushed up and for a moment seemed unable to speak. "Oh, Mr. Lynn," he stammered, "I couldn't let you do that."

"To begin with," I interrupted briskly, "if we're going to be partners why not call me Bob like your father did?"

"Bob," he murmured in a kind of distress, "it's too generous——"

"Nonsense," I said, "your knowledge and experience are a fair balance against the money. Moreover, you'll have to do most of the work."

"I don't know how to thank you," he murmured.

"Don't try," I told him. "When will you be pulling out?"

"'Deed, I'll have to stir my stumps," he said, thankful to have the gratitude business soft-pedaled. He knew that I knew the gratitude was there. "I've got to be out of this town with my outfit in ten days' time, or two weeks at the outside. Else I won't make Fort Good Hope before the harvest. I'll have to step softly too, in order to avoid attracting the attention of Gault's agent here in town. However, Gault is so darn sure of himself it would never occur to his contemptuous mind that I might set myself up against him. That's one thing in our favor."

"There's one string attached to my offer," I said.

"What's that?"

"I've got to accompany the outfit."

"You!" he cried. The tone was hardly flattering. "That's impossible! You have no idea what you would be up against."

"That's why the journey appeals to me."

"Don't misunderstand me, Mr. Lynn ——" he began earnestly.

"Bob—" I interrupted.

"Bob—'deed I'd be glad to have you along. It would be wonderful to have such a partner on the trail; to have you at hand to advise me when we get there . . . But Fort Good Hope is seven hundred miles from town. Think of it: by wagon to Miwasa Landing; by steamboat up the Miwasa to the mouth of Little River; by wagon again around the rapids; by yorkboat to the head of Caribou Lake. From there we've got a ninety mile portage over to the Spirit with the wagons sinking to the hub in every mudhole. We'll be doing well if we cover that bit under ten days. Finally there is three hundred and twenty-five miles floating down the Spirit River with our outfit on a raft. Gault's steamboat's there, but she wouldn't carry our freight. We'll be lucky if she don't try to run us down. You couldn't stand it, Bob—sleeping on the ground every night; exposed to every kind of weather; nothing to eat but sowbelly and *pakwishegan*."

"Everything you say only makes me more determined to go," I said. "You think a little dumpling of a man like me would only be an extra burden on the trail, but you'll see different. I'll take off thirty or forty pounds. I'll harden myself. Oh, I know there'll be plenty times when I'll wish I'd stayed at home, but you'll never hear a complaint out of me. Why, I would look on myself as something less than a man if I refused an adventure like this!"

"But when we get there," he objected, "we'll be up against a hellish situation. Living in an orderly town like this with a policeman on every corner, you can't picture it. Remember Gault is a proud, hard man who has enjoyed absolute power for quarter of a century. He conducts himself like an emperor up there. He has a small army under his command. There is nobody to call him to account. That is the outfit I have to fight single-handed. I *have* to go back, but you don't. It would be plumb foolhardy for you to horn in on this, Bob."

"I know it," I said, "I'm scared already, but I've got to go."

He grinned like the boy he was, and his hand shot out. "Well, if that's the way you feel about it. . . ."

We shook hands on it.

II

I COULD write a whole book about our journey—but I shall not do so. It was much worse than I expected. I embarked on it in a rosy dream of adventure, and woke up to face hard reality. I discovered that forty-eight years of civilized life render a man so 'tarnal lazy it puts him in a rage when he is obliged to exert himself. Except for our brief, blessed spell on the steamboat it was work, work, work, for sixteen hours a day or more, in icy rain or under a burning sun tormented by flies. Endless loading and unloading; endless making and breaking camp; and always some new accident or obstacle to try our ingenuity. Gosh! how tenderly I thought of my quiet office and my comfortable club!

On the different stages of the journey we had various helpers and companions, and besides losing weight, a power of conceit was knocked out of me. As a result of my success in the law and the money I had made, I thought of myself as a pretty exceptional fellow. I never realized this until I took to the trail and found a different set of values in force. Here, as a little city feller who was both soft and green, my level was a low one. When my disabilities were not openly commented on, I found myself carelessly shoved to one side. But never by Ralph. Sometimes after the others had rolled up in their blankets, he and I would sit chinning beside the fire, and more than once the good lad said:

"Gee! it's great to have a partner who savvies things like you."

This made me feel better.

We never volunteered any information about our business, but on the other hand we could not refuse to answer a direct question from a friend, and one of the hardest things we had to put up with was an old-timer's grin when he learned where we were bound for. They expected John Gault to amihilate us, and the idea seemed to tickle them to pieces.

I remember when we finally made Spirit River Crossing, twenty-eight days after leaving town, Ralph said in a tone of satisfaction:

"Well, it's been a good trip so far. No setbacks."

Words failed me. I remembered all the times the wagons had broken down or become mired; I remembered the storm on Caribou Lake which had driven us ashore and our heartbreaking exertions in saving our goods from the water, and I could only stare at the speaker. If this was a good trip, I asked myself, what must a bad one be?

At the Crossing we picked up a husky young breed named Joe Cardinal to help us down the river. He was a native of Fort Good Hope, son of one of the farmers down there, and he wanted to visit his folks. As it turned out it was a rare piece of luck, for Joe having escaped from Gault's bondage himself, understood the situation perfectly, and was keen to free his father and his brothers.

So I come to the last night of our journey, when we had been floating for five days on the current. Picture us on our raft in the mighty river, with our precious goods piled on a little deck amidships, and covered with a tarpaulin. We had traveled night and day, only going ashore occasionally to chop firewood. We cooked on a hearth of stones and clay right on board. I had had a grand rest and was feeling like my own man again. I had not slept much at night, not being able altogether to trust myself to that tremendous flow, though Ralph and Joe assured me that there were no obstructions the whole way and that the force of the current itself would keep us safely in midstream. And so it proved.

I shall never forget those nights on the big river. Now Joe lay sleeping in his blanket to one side, while Ralph and I sat nursing our knees and watching the dark shores and the stars slowly revolving around our heads as the raft turned in the eddies. We were somewhere in the neighborhood of the fifty-seventh parallel and at that season (July) there was no night to speak of. The sunset glow never faded out entirely but simply moved around the horizon from northwest to northeast, where the sun presently rose again. The silence and the dim twilight laid a spell on us, and my partner and I rarely spoke.

A GREAT peace possessed my spirit. The difficulties and the dangers that awaited us seemed of small account under those stars. You hoped that you would face them like a man, that was all. On the other hand, a deep restlessness filled my young partner, as I could tell by the twitching of his limbs and the way he would occasionally jump up and take a step or two to relieve the intolerable tenseness of his muscles. He had never mentioned her since we left town, but I guessed that he was thinking about his girl. It was more than two months since he had left Fort Good Hope, and he had had no word in the interim. Suppose he found her married to John Gault?

I searched around in my mind for some word of comfort. I said, apropos of nothing that had gone before: "There seems to be a special providence to look after the young. No matter how great the odds against them, they generally escape the worst."

He got my meaning, and his hand lay for an instant on my knee. "You understand," he said gratefully. "You realize what the odds are. Even if—even if they've been too much for her, you can't blame her. She doesn't know!"

Even in the middle of his anxieties the generous lad was seeking excuses for his girl!

Finally we swept around a great bend towards the east, and a line of jackpines topping a low ridge was fantastically fretted against the pale northern sky. At the same time the high, steep hills which had hemmed us in all the way down, drew back and seemed to diminish themselves in the gloom.

“This is the beginning of the Good Hope Flats,” said Ralph. “Only fifteen miles more. Better lie down, Bob. You'll need your sleep.”

I obeyed, and the next thing I knew he was shaking my shoulder.

“We're here!” he cried with a tremor of incontrollable excitement. “Run out your sweep, old man.”

It was broad day. I sprang up, keen for my first glimpse of the theater where our drama must be played out for good or ill. It was disappointing—a wide flat landscape bisected by the gray-green flood, not a tree in sight. The river was about half a mile wide here; the hills had drawn back for several miles on either side and looked insignificant. On the flats grew the grain for which Good Hope was famous. It was already beginning to turn golden, proving that we had come none too soon. Most of the farms were on the left-hand side of the river, whereas the buildings of the post rose on the right. Of these the most salient features were a big clapboarded house, painted yellow, and a big clapboarded store with an immense sign on the river side reading:

JOHN GAULT. FREE TRADER.

Alas, for romance!

“Good God! how ugly!” I cried.

“Huh!” said Ralph scornfully. “That's the form Gault's vanity takes. Wants to make everything look like outside.”

Our water power was in the edge of the hills to the north of the river, that is to say the left-hand side, and towards that bank we urged the raft. Here and there amid the fields of grain rose humble log shacks with sod roofs, and early as it was we were espied. Several figures started running pell-mell towards the point we were heading for. Their speed suggested a wild excitement. We grounded in the mud and jumping ashore, dragged the raft up out of danger of the current.

Along the top of the bank four figures were lined up as if rooted to the earth. Since they made no move to come nearer, we climbed the bank to greet them; an old man with a sparse white beard, a short, squat Hercules, and two slender youths. All four dark faces were transfixed with astonishment—not unmixed with terror.

“Hooralph!” they severally murmured. (So they pronounced his name.) “Hooralph! You come back— You come back here!” They glanced at the outfit on the raft. “You goin' trade wit' us? My God, what will Gault say!” And they shrunk away a little as if we were already doomed. Not a very auspicious welcome.

But Ralph took no account of it. “Miss Cranleigh,” he asked with a curious breathlessness. “How is she?”

The old man spoke. “She and her brot'er go live with Gault in big house. She sewin' her weddin' dress.”

I saw my young partner softly release his pent-up breath. So the worst had not happened. But it was a near thing.

III

RALPH sent Joe Cardinal off to greet his folks, meanwhile he and I started to carry our goods ashore. The breeds made no offer to help us, and it seemed better not to risk precipitating a situation by asking for help, so we ignored them. They watched us from the top of the bank with impassive faces. A strange race! Impossible to guess what was going on behind their coppery masks. The old man was Louis Providence, the Hercules was Tom Moosa, and the two lads were sons of the latter. Breeds they were called, and I suppose they had more or less white blood, but they were pure red in aspect.

We had not much more than started to work before we saw a boat put off from the opposite shore, a sort of gig, rowed in smart fashion by six oars. No need to ask whom this was bringing. I saw the breeds on top of the bank cast fearful glances in that direction. I saw my young partner's face harden. As for me, my heart began to beat a bit faster; it was a formidable antagonist; moreover we had to meet him on his own ground.

As the boat drew near I saw that the breed rowers were all dressed alike in blue shirts and buckskin pants with red worsted sashes around their middles. In the stern sat a handsome, black-visaged man wrapped in a boat cloak, for the morning was cool, and wearing a broad-brimmed Stetson cocked at a dashing angle. At ten strokes' distance he looked like a youth, but close at hand one perceived the lines left by fifty years of hard living.

When they touched he stood up, dropping the cloak and revealing a tall, lean figure with great dignity of carriage. My heart sunk a little, because of course I always appear at a disadvantage alongside such a man.

His manner was smooth, courteous, smiling; nothing of the rude fur trader here; citizen of the world was his ideal.

"Well, Ralph," he said, shaking hands with an indulgent air, "so you have come back! . . . And who is this gentleman?"

"My friend and partner, Robert Lynn," said Ralph curtly.

"Mr. Lynn," said Gault with the utmost courtesy, "welcome to Fort Good Hope . . . Ralph's partner? What?" He looked at the goods strewn about the shore. "Going to set up shop here, I see." He laughed in a deprecating, almost pitying fashion. "Well, well, well! Mr. Lynn, I'm afraid you don't know what you've been let in for. Dear me, dear me! I'm sorry."

Gault's courtesy was superficially perfect, but his dandy breed oarsmen stood about grinning at us in open insolence.

"Oh, my eyes are wide open," I said cheerfully.

Gault appeared to take notice, for the first time, of the breeds on top of the bank. These had now increased to six or eight. "You men!" he cried in a rasping, parade ground voice. "What's the matter with you! You see that strangers have come to the post. Lend a hand here!"

They hastened down the bank and seized bags and boxes. Gault had ordered this of course, not out of any kindness, but merely to show off his power. He turned to me saying with a light laugh:

"Let the natives work. It's not a white man's place."

Notwithstanding his elaborate coolness and humor, I could see that the man's black eyes had become sharp and mean with curiosity. He was taking a silent inventory of everything we had brought. The packing cases containing the parts of the mill teased him. Kicking one of them, he asked carelessly:

"What's in here?"

"Christmas presents," growled Ralph.

Gault affected to laugh. "Men," he said, "Ralph Barnhill has come back to be our Santa Claus."

A loud guffaw greeted this witticism. My partner was young enough to change color, but it didn't affect me at all. I am accustomed to such cheap jibes in the courtroom. The thing to do is to come back with another just as cheap. So I said mildly:

"Perhaps they don't know what Christmas is up here."

He made believe not to hear me. However he treated me with more respect thereafter, addressing most of his conversation to me.

"Mr. Lynn," he said with smooth hypocrisy, "you are man of the world enough to understand that though we are competitors and antagonists there need be no personal hard feelings between us."

"Of course not," I said ironically.

"If I can be of any assistance don't hesitate to call on me. The first thing you must do is to get your outfit stowed under a roof. I have a little shack on this side of the river that I use as a warehouse when the Indians come in to trade. You are very welcome to that for . . ."

Ralph interrupted him. "Much obliged," he said, "but we have made other arrangements."

Gault's eyes narrowed like a rat's. It was a little trick he had that spoiled the effect of all his elegant protestations. He went on in a voice of acid courtesy: "I'm sorry, Mr. Lynn, that I have to begin our acquaintance with an apology. Hospitality in the North is an obligation that is laid upon us. Under any other circumstances I should insist upon your coming to my house and remaining there as long as I could persuade you to. Unfortunately my establishment is in great confusion at the moment. In fact I am going to be married in a few days."

He said this with the tail of his eye on Ralph, but Ralph, having been warned, gave no sign.

"At any rate I trust I can count on your coming to my wedding?" said Gault. "Both of you."

"Charmed," I replied.

He made to return to his boat, but stopped as if struck by a sudden thought. "Mr. Lynn," he asked, "how much did this outfit stand you in cash? I ask it as a friend."

"Thanks for the friendliness," said I, "but I don't care to say."

He cast his eye over our goods again.

"Well I should say three thousand dollars. I'll give you two thousand as it stands. I would hate to see a stranger lose *all* his money."

The hard eye, the affected kindliness of voice conveyed the very perfection of insult. I saw my young friend's face flush darkly, and in order to avert an explosion, I put my arm around his shoulders and tried to get him to laugh with me. The only effective rejoinder to this sort of thing is a grin.

"Well, Ralph and I never expected to find such benevolence up here," I said grinning. "We couldn't allow you to sacrifice yourself, Mr. Gault. The loss of what little I've put into this outfit won't hurt me, and I expect to have a lot of fun out of it."

My grin was a little too much for Gault's self-control. His face turned black and murderous. For a space he let his glittering eyes rest on my face in order to intimidate me. Never have I received such an impression of pure evil. However, I still contrived to grin.

Finally with a shrug, he stepped into his boat. "Oh very well," he said, "but don't forget later, that I warned you. . . . When your business will permit come over and see what kind of a store *I* keep," he added as a final insult.

"Surely. I'm anxious to learn as much as I can about the way you do business," I replied, "so that I may know what to avoid," I added sotto voce.

I was rewarded by seeing Ralph grin. Gault had already seated himself in the boat, and his back was turned towards me. His men rowed him away.

IV

WHEN Joe Cardinal returned, we carried all our goods to the top of the bank, and spread a tarpaulin over them. Ralph, with set jaw and scowling brows, did the work of three men, spending his strength savagely. Clearly his thoughts were elsewhere. When everything was neatly stowed it came out.

"Bob," he said taking me apart, "I've got to go over and see Mary. Gault will push this marriage along now. He will try to rush her into it before she learns that I have returned."

My heart sank at the prospect of another encounter with Gault so soon, but there was only one thing I could say. "All right. Let's go."

His somber eyes lighted up gratefully. "But you needn't come," he said. "You'll have plenty of trouble out of this without going in search of it."

"As a fighter," I said lightly, "I would be of darn little use to you, but as a witness I am invaluable. To put it plainly, you shouldn't take a step in this neighborhood without having a friend with you. Joe will keep watch over the outfit while we're gone."

"You're right," he said. "I'll be glad to have you."

A short distance from where we had landed, a dugout lay on the shore. Upon inquiry, we learned that it belonged to old Providence. Ralph asked for permission to use it and was met with a shake of the head.

"Got not'in' 'gainst you, me," the old man said deprecatingly. "If I help you Gault is mad wit' me. Give no more credit at store."

"Here are plenty of store goods," said Ralph. "I will give you credit."

Another shake of the head. "What I do when you gone?"

"Well, we'll talk about that later," said Ralph. "I'm going to take the canoe. All these men will witness that you refused it to me and that I took it anyway. So you can't be blamed."

The old man seemed not ill-pleased at this outcome. We shoved the cranky craft into the water and got in. It was my first experience of a dugout. It was hollowed from the trunk of a cottonwood tree, and had turned silvery with age. It looked none too sound. I picked up my paddle gingerly.

"Don't try to paddle," said Ralph. "Sit on the bottom and your weight will steady her. It's nothing to me to run you across."

I was glad enough to obey.

As we drew near the other shore I was able to survey the post in greater detail. The principal buildings were arranged around three sides of a square with the fourth side open to the river. Gault's big house was at the right hand, the store at the left, and the back of the square was filled in with a row of simple log shacks that had evidently been the first buildings at Good Hope. There was a flagpole in the center of the square, with a little brass cannon at its foot. Behind the store there was a long shed built of sawn lumber, and having a wood burning chimney with a cage to catch the sparks.

"The electric light plant, flour mill and sawmill are in there," said Ralph.

I was surprised to see two tall poles with antennæ stretched between them. "Wireless, too?" I asked.

"Gault has had a receiving set for several years," said Ralph. "Now he's putting in a little sending station so he can communicate with his agent in town."

"Will it pay?" I said.

"No," said Ralph scornfully. "But it will impress the natives. They're becoming accustomed to the older wonders."

When we landed and climbed the bank, I saw that there was a neat plank sidewalk all the way around the square with poles at intervals from which hung incandescent lights. It certainly was a strange sight, seven hundred miles from town.

"That is Gault's style," said Ralph sneering. "When there're any Indians about, he claps his hands and the lights go on."

"You certainly must give him credit for being enterprising," I said.

"Oh, he's enterprising enough," retorted Ralph, "but the people around here are starving."

OUR visit as I need hardly say, did not take Gault by surprise. Some of the members of his natty boat crew were lounging on a bench near the foot of the flagpole, and I had seen one of them go to the house as we approached the shore. We likewise directed our steps there. The house was surrounded by a neat picket fence, but nothing grew in the yard excepting buffalo grass. Gault was evidently swayed more by practical considerations than esthetic. There was a wide porch in front with fancy turned pillars and a deal of gingerbread work in the worst possible taste of twenty years ago.

Ralph hesitated with a hand on the gate post saying: "They'll never let us in, Bob."

I wondered why he hadn't considered that before.

He went on, looking at me with a curious smile: "You may not believe it, but I was once the most popular man at the post. It was because I could sing a little. They are starving for music. There was one song that was called for every time we got together. I'll show you how it goes."

He sang:

"Oh, there was a youth, a well-beloved
youth,
And he was a squire's son,
Who loved the bailiff's daughter fair,
That lived in Islington . . ."

Everybody knows the old song, and the tugging wistfulness that it conveys under the half facetious words. To hear it under those circumstances welling out in Ralph's young voice made me—well, it made me feel queerly emotional. A shiver passed over me.

The song produced instant action. The front door of the house banged open, and Gault strode out on the porch, fairly electrified with rage. Two of his boatmen were at his heels. "What is this damned mummery?" he cried.

Ralph, singing, ignored him. The young man's eyes were searching from window to window of the second story. Gault with his long legs came striding down the path, a figure of ungovernable rage with clenched fists and bared teeth. Before he reached the gate a white figure appeared behind one of the upstairs windows, a delicate, wistful wraith half seen through the glass. Ralph swept off his Stetson. Gault, seeing the action, looked over his shoulder and stopped.

"Well, why don't you assault me?" asked Ralph with a hard smile.

A violent ugly struggle took place in Gault's face. The outcome was—self-control. A strange man! When he raised his head it was to show the same, devilish, mocking smile with which he had first welcomed us that morning. "Oh, I see this little demonstration is for Miss Cranleigh's benefit," he said, sneering. "Rather early in the day isn't it, for a serenade? If you wanted to see her, why didn't you come to the house and ask for her?"

"I knew better," said Ralph.

"Do you want to see her?" asked Gault pointblank.

"Yes," answered Ralph hardily.

"Then come in," he said, turning up the walk, and leaving us to follow.

Behind his back Ralph favored me with a grim smile. He knew Gault pretty well, having worked for him three years. Bareheaded, Gault looked older. The shadow cast by his broad-brimmed hat had been kind to his seamed face. His hair, while still plentiful, was of an unnatural blackness, and I was reminded of Ralph's reference to hair dye.

He led us into his house, and into a small room to the left of the door which he termed "my library" though there were no books in evidence. It was filled with furniture well enough made, but having an atrocious polish. Here he dismissed his men with a word in Cree, and pressed a button which was presently answered by a neatly dressed breed woman. Notwithstanding her stolid air I saw her bat an astonished eye in Ralph's direction. Gault said:

"Please tell Miss Cranleigh that Mr. Barnhill is here, and ask her if she will come down to see him."

I could not help but admire the man's style. He was now perfectly calm in manner. While we waited he exhibited his furniture to us. He had made it himself, it appeared. As furniture it was not remarkable, but only to find it north of the fifty-seventh parallel.

The native woman, returning, said in her impassive way: "Miss Mary say please excuse."

Gault shrugged slightly, and looked down his nose in a way that was indescribably insulting.

Ralph flushed red.

"Is she locked in her room?" he said.

Gault immediately turned to the woman.

"Tell Miss Mary," he said, "that Mr. Barnhill thinks I have locked her in her room. Ask her if she won't come down for a moment to show him."

The woman went away. This time we waited in a strained silence; no conversation.

There was a softly descending sound on the stairs, and the white-clad figure stood in the doorway. Her loveliness took my breath away. It was so strange to find in that womanless country such a unique specimen. The Indians had a word for her which describes her as well as anything; it meant Big White Star, or Evening Star. She had just that palely luminous quality. She was a light blonde with a clear, pale skin and great blue eyes.

At her first glance at Ralph I wondered greatly indeed if she did not love him. She moved to be beside Gault, yet for all the self-possession she bore, her eyes concealed something secret and baffling in their depths. I would have wagered right then that she was not happy. But I would have been hard put to prove it.

Gault's manner towards her was courteous, but possessive.

"You got my message, Mary?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied. It was a statement of fact, without comment.

"There is nothing you wish to say?"

"No, there is nothing."

"All right, Mary. Thank you for coming here. You may go if you wish."

For a moment it seemed that she might change her mind and speak. Then she started towards the door. I was completely at sea, for she had obviously reached her own conclusions and chosen her own course. Gault smiled. And at that Ralph spoke, earnestly and desperately.

"Mary, is it true that you refused to see me?"

She stopped.

"Of what use would that be now?" she asked. "You understand, of course, that——"

"He knows that we are to be married in a few days," Gault broke in.

"Then . . ." she murmured with a slight gesture, and started for the door again.

"Wait, Mary, wait!" cried Ralph. "There is something I must tell you." She paused again. "Such a marriage would be a crime against nature!" he cried. "This man is nearly three times your age. What is more he's a scoundrel—a cold and pitiless scoundrel! All the world knows it. What chance would you stand married to such a one. I can't bear it."

The effect of this outburst was, of course, to shake her composure mightily. She abandoned her intention to depart and returned to us again. As she gazed at Ralph I was astonished at the emotions I beheld in conflict in her eyes. There was pain and pride. There was love, and I was ready to swear it was love for Ralph, whether she was aware of it or not. And there was resentment, the natural sense of injury any woman will feel when her choice of mates is so scathingly criticized.

She placed her hand on Gault's arm. He

patted her hand, pleased as could be.

"I think you had better go, Mary," he said.

But Ralph made his way blindly out of the room without another word.

I overtook Ralph on the walk outside. His head was down.

"Oh, God, Rob! You heard it. You saw it," he groaned. "What is there for me to do? Throw myself into the river?"

"Nonsense!" I said sharply. "I'm not going to say anything. The situation's as bad as it can be, and for me to try to console you would only be hypocritical. But —you and I came up here to fight and not to throw ourselves in the river."

It stiffened him.

"Good head!" he said curtly, and flung an arm around my shoulder. "That's what I needed . . . We'll fight!"

"I must speak plainly," I said. "Have you ever told Mary that you loved her?"

"She knows it," he muttered.

"That may be, but have you ever told her?"

"No."

"That was what you should have done instead of abusing Gault."

"Before *him*," he said scowling.

"This is no time for false shame," I said. "What you've got to do now is to write and tell her. Tell her with all the force and passion of which you are capable."

"I don't know how to write."

"Forget yourself," I said, "and let it come of itself. You shamefaced young men make me tired. There's plenty of honest passion in you. Well, release it, convey it to her, let her know it. . . . I'll find some way of placing the letter in her hands."

THE letter was written and dispatched. As to whether it reached its destination we could only speculate. Its chances were not too good.

Our sole source of information in the settlement was Benoosis Cardinal and his wife Nana, the parents of our Joe. This worthy couple appeared to be more intelligent than their neighbors. They would not come out for us openly, having no hope of the success of our enterprise, but they received us secretly, and they talked freely. Mrs. Cardinal told us that Eelip Trudeau, the breed woman who worked in Gault's house, came across the river to see her family every Saturday, and she promised to try to persuade her to carry the letter. I bribed each woman with a bag of sugar, untold riches to these poor people.

So it was done. Eelip told Mrs. Cardinal that she was searched when she left Gault's house to go home, and again when she returned, but said that she would hide the letter under a stone on the river bank, where she could get it later. Day after day Ralph waited in a strained anxiety for some word or sign from Mary, but none ever came. However the wedding did not take place, and I argued hopefully from that.

Meanwhile the three of us were working from four in the morning until nine at night to get things ready to start. A fresh obstacle faced us at every turn. Every native was a potential spy of Gault's. We felt his power surrounding us like a wall. We never could allow ourselves to stop and consider the chances against us. Our enterprise was, to a grotesque degree, a forlorn hope. The only thing to do was to plug ahead, concentrating exclusively on the job immediately in hand.

To begin with nobody would lend or hire us a team to transport our goods to our location. In the end we had to do as we had done with the dugout—go to St. Pierre Mitchell's corral and seize his team and put them to his wagon. St. Pierre and his friends stood by cursing us heartily, but dared not offer physical resistance to white men. So we got our goods on our own ground. On the following day we received a note from Gault.

Messrs. Barnhill and Lynn.
Gentlemen:

For twenty-five years I have maintained law and order at Fort Good Hope with such success that the R. N. W. M. P. have never found it necessary to send a detachment here. I have affidavits respecting your lawless acts of yesterday, and this is to notify you that if anything of the sort occurs again, I shall immediately ask for the police.

Yours very truly,
John Gault.

To which we replied:

John Gault, Esq:
Dear Sir:

If we continue to find ourselves hampered by your orders in the conduct of our legitimate business, we have every intention of taking the law into our own hands, and we *therefore strongly recommend that you bring in the police as quickly as possible.*

Yours very truly,
Barnhill and Lynn.

The police were not sent for.

Our location was in a charming grassy dell between two spurs of the hills, three miles from the river. At the head of the little valley a small river fell over a lip of rock thirty feet high into a deep pool below. There was a good flow of water, but Ralph said it would dry up completely when the big freeze came. However, all our grain, provided we got any, must be ground by that time. Above the fall there was plenty of good timber, and all we had to do for building material was to chop down trees and throw them over.

The grain would be harvested in two or three weeks, and I immediately saw that we must have more labor if we were to be ready for it. So I returned to the settlement in search of it. I went first to Tom Moosa who was said to have six strong sons. But all my persuasive powers were spent in vain. Tom's invariable reply was:

"John Gault soon smash you. When you gone back outside, then he smash me."

It was a chance remark from one of the young men that finally gave me my cue. He said: "What for you come here anyway? You got better country outside."

I perceived that "outside" to them was the land of storied wonders, and that every young fellow of spirit burned to behold it. So I said: "Well, suppose what you say is true. Suppose Gault drives us out. If three of these young men will come to work for us now, I promise to take them with us when we go, and find them jobs outside."

After that they were mine. Their father could do nothing with them. I tried to console him by saying: "They are of age. Tell Gault you ordered them to stay at home, and they refused to obey you. Let him come after them himself."

Since the mill was all important, we could not stop to build a store. We put up a tent instead and displayed our goods inside it. There, day after day they remained untouched. All the breeds came to look and to price everything, and credit was freely offered them against the delivery of grain later, but though their mouths watered at our prices, there were no takers. The medium of exchange at Fort Good Hope was the beaver skin. Money had never been used there.

THE installation of our mill presented no great engineering difficulties. We planned to divert part of the stream above the fall, and lead it through a short flume over the water-wheel, which was to be erected at the edge of the pool below. We had brought a hub, axle and bearings for the wheel, and were to make the frame out of pine poles and the paddles out of our packing boxes. There was plenty of good lumber at the post, but we couldn't buy it. The water-wheel would be our vulnerable spot, and as soon as we could, we intended to build a stout palisade around it.

The millhouse itself was a stout, squat structure of logs roofed with poles, and made watertight with thick sods. With a strong door of reinforced poles, and shutters of the same sort for the windows, it was secure against any ordinary means of attack. We breathed more freely when we got it up, and our packing cases inside. We made our beds in there, grouped around our precious machines, which were never left unwatched for an instant.

One day we were visited by John Gault on horseback, who was followed by a small crowd of his dark-skinned henchmen. As soon as they appeared at the lower end of our little valley, Ralph and the three Moosa boys locked themselves in the millhouse and went on with their work. We did not mean to risk having anything "accidentally" smashed. Joe Cardinal and I waited to receive our visitors outside the tent.

Gault rode up with a fixed, hard smile on his face. His black eyes darted this way and that, sharp with curiosity. The big water-wheel was lying half finished in the grass beside the pool, and even if the trader had not been informed in advance of our activities, he must have seen at a glance what we were up to. He made believe to shake his head and smile in a pitying fashion.

"Certainly is sad to see so much misdirected energy," he remarked.

I let it go at that.

"Where's Ralph?" he asked.

"He's busy in the mill," I said offhand.

"A mill?" he exclaimed, running up his eyebrows in affected surprise. "What kind of mill?"

"Oh, it will grind your flour or saw your logs or anything else you may require," I said.

"A flour mill?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me? I have Charley Sashermah, my miller, here. He'd be invaluable to you in setting it up."

"I'm sure he would," I said dryly. "But as long as we have to run it we thought we had better acquaint ourselves with it from the ground up."

"Let's go take a look at it," he said.

I followed him around to the door of the millhouse. On the freshly squared poles of the door they had hastily painted up:

NO ADMITTANCE! THIS MEANS YOU!

The paint was wet. Gault's face was not pleasant as he read it. "Not very hospitable," he remarked.

"Well, you understand we have to protect ourselves from meddlers," I said in a confidential tone. As long as it was only a verbal set-to, I flattered myself I could give as good as I got. "But you can speak to Ralph through the window," I said.

He looked through one of the windows. Inside our mill was beginning to take shape on its heavy wooden sills. Gault sneered. He would have liked to plant a stick of dynamite under it. He looked at Ralph through narrowed lids. You could see the man preparing to eject poison. He said in his smooth, false voice:

"Ralph, I must congratulate you on your powers of expression. I enjoyed your letter more than the person to whom it was addressed. She asked me to request you not to write again."

I saw the red creep up from my young partner's neck, and I was terrified that he was going to make a foolish answer. As for me, whatever Mary may have thought of his letter, I was ready to stake my life that she had not showed it to Gault or told him about it. Gault was simply fishing. Well, Ralph took his time about answering, and evidently he made up his mind to the same effect. He said, affecting to busy himself with the machine:

"I don't get you, Mr. Gault. I have not written to any lady that I know of."

Gault with a laugh, walked away. He and I entered the tent together. Our goods were all set out on rough counters and shelves made of poles, according to the best principles of merchandising. Gault took everything in with a sneer.

"Business good?" he asked.

"We're not complaining," I said.

His attention fastened on a big bucket of candies that we had brought in. They were the sort known as "French creams," terrible stuff, but the natives had a passion for them. It had attracted them as much as anything we had brought. Gault, who was sure of getting all they had anyway, rarely troubled to import such luxuries.

"How much for the candy?" he said.

"Seven pounds the skin."

"How much in that bucket?"

"There was fifty pounds, but we've handed out a little. Say forty-nine pounds."

"Seven skins," said Gault, "or forty-nine dollars at the present rate. I'll take it." From his pocket he pulled a roll of bills, while the breeds stared.

"Pardon me," I objected, "but we don't sell for cash. We're traders. Always glad to make a trade with you."

"What for?"

Now that candy was valuable to us on account of the pull it had for the breeds, so I named the one thing I knew he would never let us have. "Half a thousand feet of sawn lumber," I said.

"Done!" said Gault. "Take the bucket, Charley."

But I intervened again. "When we get the lumber," I said.

"What!" said Gault puffing himself up. "Don't you trust me?"

"Surely," I said smoothly, "but a trade is a trade. When you send over the lumber you can get the candy."

Gault, affecting to laugh heartily, strode out and mounted his horse. The whole crowd rode away laughing derisively. It didn't faze me. I felt for the moment anyway, that we could afford to smile ourselves.

Ralph came out of the millhouse with a white face and gripped my arm.

"Do you think he read my letter?" he said.

"No," said I. "If he had, he would

have taunted you with the contents. I take it that some alteration in the young lady's behavior has led him to suspect that there *was* a letter, and he is trying to find out. This is pretty good evidence that your letter was delivered, and that it had some effect. Better write another."

At my suggestion they knocked off work for a while, and all hands carried the store goods into the millhouse and stowed them at one end out of the way. It was well. That night a party of horsemen suddenly rode at the tent and leveled it flat. No damage was done except to the improvised fixtures inside. Suspecting that they might attack our wheel with axes, we shot out of the window and drove them away.

V

NEXT evening at dusk I carried Ralph's letter down to the Cardinals' shack. There I learned that Eelip Trudeau had been forbidden to cross the river any more, so it was up to me to find another means of delivering it. Gault's little steamboat had come down the river within the hour, bringing freight and mail from the outside world. A party of breeds was preparing to cross in one of the big boats they call "sturgeon heads" and I resolved to carry the letter over myself. I had some nasty qualms, considering how easy it would be for them to drop me overboard in midstream. However, I reflected that Ralph was Gault's mark not me, and that I would be safe enough. So I went along.

Reaching the other side I saw that the store was brilliantly lighted up, evidently the scene of a general gathering. Gault was certainly there, and yielding to a sudden impulse, I turned in the direction of the house. Eelip Trudeau answered the door. I simply showed her the note folded small on the palm of my hand, with a cheap ring lying upon it that I had got out of our store. From the instant way her hand closed over both objects, I argued for the best. She said—I suppose for the benefit of any other servant who might be within earshot:

"Miss Mary gone to bed. No can see."

"All right," I said. "I'll call another time."

I hastened over to the store. So little time had this digression taken that I entered at the tail of the party which had brought me over. Inside there was a crowd of men sitting and standing about, listening to the latest gossip of the country as related by the captain of the steamboat. Gault welcomed me with ironical politeness. In order to account for my appearance, I asked if there was any mail.

"I haven't opened the bag yet," he said. "I'll send it to you in the morning."

This I made sure was only an excuse. I believed that our letters would be well scanned before we received them.

I had to wait then until my party was ready to return. Gault ushered me to a seat of honor behind the counter, where I sat smoking and listening. I learned something of the lore of the country that night, but it has nothing to do with my story. Among other things, the steamboat had brought the apparatus for Gault's wireless station, together with the young white man who was to install it and operate it. He was a keen and likable fellow, Stan Echolls by name. I reflected that Gault could hardly have any strings on him, and that he would make a valuable friend, if I could only find a way to establish relations with him. In one of the newspapers lying on the counter I was pleased to see an account of my departure from town. In case he did not already know it, this would inform Gault that I was not the sort of person who could disappear without inquiry being made.

Several nights later on Joe Cardinal's next visit to his parents, he brought back word that Miss Mary Cranleigh was sick. Ralph, in a fever, was instantly for setting off across the river. I was hard put to it to dissuade him.

"There is no doctor," he cried in distress.

"Well, you're not a doctor," I pointed out. "You can't supply the lack. If she *is* sick, her brother will take care of her. All the missionaries nowadays are required to have medical knowledge . . . But I believe this is good news instead of bad," I went on. "If there was anything specific the matter such as scarlet fever or pneumonia it would have been reported, but she is just said to be 'sick.' That is woman's excuse the world over for gaining time."

On the following night we received grim testimony as to the success of Ralph's letter. During the day, with an improvised derrick, we raised our completed wheel and lowered it into place. It was a clumsy-looking affair, fifteen feet in diameter, but it turned easily and true, and we were well pleased with our work. Since we had built one side of the millhouse overhanging the pool, the wheel was difficult to come at except through the water, but Ralph was so fearful our enemies would try to destroy it, that he insisted on watching it throughout the dark hours. He would not allow either Joe nor myself to take his place. Gun in hand, he lay on the shelf of rock alongside the fall, where he could overlook millhouse, wheel and our whole premises.

IT SEEMED to me that I had scarcely fallen asleep when I was awakened by the sound of a shot. I ran out of the house, sick with anxiety. I heard a horse galloping away around the side of the hill. I scrambled up the slope towards Ralph's post and met him coming back. In the light of my flash I saw that his face was streaming with blood. I groaned.

He showed his white teeth in the effort to reassure me. A ghastly sight, that smile.

"Only a scratch!" he said in a cheerful voice. "The beggar crept around the side of the hill and took me in the rear where I wasn't expecting him. But I heard a sound and rolled over. That saved me. His bullet knocked up a splinter of rock that caught me over the eye. I never had a sight of him."

I led him back to the house.

"Oh, if we only had some way of pursuing him!" he groaned.

"Wouldn't do us much good," I pointed out, "unless we could bring it home to his master."

While he washed his face, and I applied a strip of plaster to the wound, we talked things over. We had not been sure before that Gault was prepared to go to the length of murder. It lent a grim tensity to the situation. We decided to send out for the police on our own account without the loss of an hour. The hardest of the construction work was over now, and we could spare two of the Moosa boys to carry a letter to Spirit River Crossing. It would take them two weeks to ascend against the current, and four days to come down. We decided that Tom Jr. and Modest were the most dependable—which wasn't saying much. Under our direction they were good working boys, but left to their own devices, like all the breeds, apt to be perfectly scatter-brained. However, we had no choice. It was impossible for either one of us to go, or for Joe Cardinal to be spared.

We had made the acquaintance of Sergeant Anders on the way in, and I now wrote to him detailing the attacks that had been made on our camp, and asking for protection. Hooliam, the third brother, and I then helped the boys carry their outfit to the river, where I saw them off in one of their own canoes.

Of the result, I need only say that they returned two days later with sheepish faces, claiming that they had been robbed of the letter while they slept by their fire.

"But you knew what was in the letter," I said, "why didn't you go on to the Crossing, and tell Sergeant Anders to come."

Modest's black eyes rolled in terror. "They all tam watchin' us I t'ink, me," he said. "Next tam sleep—*clk!* (He illustrated with a gesture of slitting the throat.) Throw in river!"

His brother energetically nodded.

What could we do? It was impossible to discover if they *had* been followed, or, becoming terrified at the prospect of so long a journey, had themselves destroyed the letter. At any rate, Ralph and I had to give up hope of receiving aid from that quarter.

VI

DAY by day Gault tightened the screws, and a black time succeeded for us. Our three breed boys cracked under the strain, and one morning they slipped away without our seeing them go. It is a way they have. That left only the three of us to do all the work and keep watch at night besides. It was too much to ask of the human frame. I volunteered to go in to the settlement to get the boys.

It was a useless errand. Their father hid them from me. I never did come up with them.

However towards the end of the day

two of them, Modest and Hooliam, turned up again as mysteriously as they had disappeared, and asked to be taken back again. Ralph was overjoyed, but I thought I perceived a new and shifty look in their savage eyes.

"What did you run away for?" I asked.

"We scare' Gault hurt us," said Modest, who did most of the talking for the family. "So we go home. But Gault send over. Say, come to the store. Then we scare some more. T'ink he act bad to us 'cause we been workin' for you. So we come back. T'ink maybe you not let Gault catch us."

It was a little too glib to be convincing.

"Where is young Tom?" I asked.

"Tom, he gone down river to Oncle's place."

I privately determined to keep a sharp watch on the pair.

The days were growing a little shorter now. It became dark about nine thirty and the dawn broke about half past two. Between those hours that night, Joe Cardinal was to keep watch from our lookout on the rocks, while the rest of us slept in the house. I meant to keep awake.

Along about midnight I heard some suspicious mouselike stirrings on the other side of the machine. I waited until I was sure, then suddenly switched on my flashlight. I caught both lads in the act of gathering up our bolting frames, an essential part of the mill, and one impossible to replace. They had already opened the door of the shack to facilitate their getaway. As the light went on they dashed for the door, dropping the frames, but I was nearer, I cut them off.

Ralph, aroused by the racket, went for them like a lion. He was ready to have killed them for their treachery. I grappled with him and yelled to them to get out. They faded.

"Oh, if we killed a couple of them it would force a showdown," groaned Ralph. "It would call attention to the situation here."

"Maybe," I said dryly, "but it would suit Gault far too well. Let the other side do the killings."

Joe Cardinal ran down to see what was the matter. Upon investigating we found that no damage had been done.

By day or by night Gault gave us no peace. Even in broad day while two of us worked, the third had to watch the hillsides to make sure that no one was taking a pot-shot at us. Occasionally we would see a furtive figure slipping from bush to bush. There were no trees on these hillsides, but patches of wild rose scrub that afforded good cover. On these occasions I always had difficulty in preventing Ralph from trying a shot on his own. Every night, on the other hand, we knew that parties of horsemen rode around our camp. We would see their tracks in the morning. The fact that the sound of the waterfall prevented us from hearing other sounds outside increased the tension.

On the shelf of rock alongside the fall, we threw up a little earthen redoubt to protect the watcher there. Every night as darkness was falling one of us made a dash for it, and lay there watching the water gate, the flume and the wheel until dawn. In spite of our care one night they contrived to creep along the base of the rock (our house had no window on that side) and undermined the supports of the flume until the whole thing crashed down. It was not a fatal accident, because we could set it up again, but the additional delay was heartbreaking. Already the farmers were cutting their grain and stocking it to await the thresher, and our mill was not yet assembled.

But the worst blow fell the next time Joe went down to see his people. He returned in a suspiciously short time with a face full of trouble. It appeared that Gault by some means, we never learned just how, had terrorized his father and mother to the extent that his own mother begged him not to come there again as long as he was determined to stick by us. I must say for Joe that he never hesitated. He told us briefly what had happened, and took his gun as a matter of course, and went up to stand watch. He was a white man though his skin was dark. This accident cut us off entirely from the settlement. We had no means of learning what was going on.

Morally and physically the strain was awful. Men can stand anything if they are buoyed up by hope; but we had no hope. There was nothing to persuade us that help was in store, or that the situation could become anything but worse. Gault appeared to hold all the cards. He was just toying with us. We fell silent at our work; silent and short with each other. Any trifle was enough to provoke a quarrel. Ralph's principal anxiety was on my account. A dozen times he said:

"I wish you'd go up on the steamboat."

And each time it angered me afresh.

One morning when things were at their darkest, one of Gault's breed servants came riding up the valley. He raised his hand in token of amity just as if we were actually at war. He bore a letter addressed to Barnhill and Lynn. It read:

> *I offer you fifteen hundred dollars for your outfit. My steamboat goes up tomorrow morning, and you can have free passage to Spirit River Crossing. After she has gone my price will go down.*
>
> *John Gault.*

"I carry answer back," said the breed.

Ralph looked at me. "What shall I write?" he asked, in a low tone.

"Write nothing," I answered. "Keep him guessing."

"There is no answer," said Ralph, and the breed rode back.

Four hours later, that is to say after the noon spell, he came with another note. This time he was leading a spare horse. The note was addressed to Ralph. As he read it I saw him change color, and a wild hope spring up in his face. He handed it to me with a hand that trembled slightly, his eyes begging me for confirmation. I read:

> *Dear Ralph:*
>
> *Please come to me at once without fail. I must talk to you. It is vitally important.*
>
> *Mary.*

I shook my head.

"This is a trick," I said reluctantly.

His face flushed red with anger.

"I know her handwriting," he burst out. "Mary is incapable of a trick!"

"Consciously, yes," I said. "But she has been led into this innocently by Gault. In your heart you know it."

"I don't care!" he cried recklessly. "I've got to go!"

I saw that it was useless to argue with him. "Very well," I said, "I'll go with you."

This meant we had to leave Joe alone to guard everything. He expressed himself as willing. He took his gun and went up to the top of the rock where he could better overlook the whole works. We put the breed off his horse and rode hard for the river, leaving him to follow on foot. At the water's edge we found Gault's own gig waiting, and were carried across in short order.

Eelip Trudeau with her bland, impassive face opened the door to us, and led us into the library. We did not see Gault anywhere, but for aught I know he may have been listening behind a door. Mary Cranleigh ran downstairs, and came to a pause framed in the doorway. I was shocked at the change in her appearance. Her pale skin had lost its luminous quality; the blue eyes looked too big for her face. My young partner visibly hungered at the sight of her.

"Mary, you have been sick!" he cried solicitously.

"Not in body," she said with a slight gesture; "only anxious." She looked at me doubtfully. "I wanted to speak to you alone."

Ralph was instantly ready to banish me from the room, but I stood my ground.

"I accompany him for his safety's sake," I said.

"You are in no danger here," she said to him with a spice of indignation.

Anxious not to anger her, Ralph remained silent.

"Oh well, it doesn't matter," she said. "If Mr. Lynn is your friend he will bear me out. I wanted to beg you to leave this place."

Ralph's face fell. He had expected something different. I could not bear to see these young things torture each other, and so after all, I went out and waited in the hall.

"Why did you ever come back here?" I heard her ask.

"You know," said Ralph. "It was to win you."

"It was certainly no time to start that," she said. "So please go now. Go up on the steamboat tomorrow. I must implore it!"

"But why?"

"Because your life is in danger here!"

"And are you willing to marry the man who is trying to murder me?"

"Oh, how can you say such a thing!" she cried. "John is trying to save you. It is the breeds across the river who are your enemies. You don't know how to handle them. You have angered them with your high-handed ways. They prowl around your camp at night looking for a chance to shoot you. One of them is bound to kill you in the end."

"So that is what Gault tells you," murmured Ralph. "Oh well . . . Listen, Mary," he went on in a firmer voice, "I've got to tell you the truth though it angers you. My only enemy at this post is John Gault. He is enraged because I have come here to trade. My outfit's only a small one, but even if it were less, my mere presence here would force him to deal squarely with the natives. That is why I must be driven out."

"That's not true!"

"It certainly is true," Ralph asserted. "Bob is no fool. He knows the truth. You forget that I worked for Gault three years. I am familiar with every detail of his business."

"So am I. He has shown me everything."

"Oh, this is useless," groaned Ralph.

"You are right," she said. "It is useless. So you'll go away tomorrow and end it. I am sure you do not want to make me suffer any more."

"What do you care what happens to me?" he said harshly.

"I fear I must care," she said. "You came back here on my account. If anything were to happen to you through me, I—I couldn't bear it."

"I believe you love me very much," he whispered.

"That is nonsense," she said. "I am pledged to marry another man."

"Well, I'm passionately in love with you. I've written you that, but I never told you before; you must hear it once. I love you with all my heart. Nothing else means a thing to me. Such as I am you own me completely. I am useless to myself. I worship you."

"Stop!" she cried. "I cannot listen to such things. You must go now. Hurry before Gault returns."

"Are you in love with him?" he asked harshly.

"Please, Ralph—you shouldn't. Go now——"

"Then there's no more to say."

I judged from the sound that he was coming out.

"And will you go tomorrow?" she asked.

"No," he said. "I stay here."

He came out of the room with a fixed, white face. We left the house.

Outside he muttered: "Did I do right? You heard. Scarcely knew what I was saying."

"You did right," I said. "You played a man's part."

VII

I MUST go back a little way and explain that for the last ten days I had been making frequent trips by myself over to Gault's store. In order to obtain the means to do so I had traded off the coveted bucket of candy for a small skiff that I could row myself. Gault was the more willing to let me have it because he could not see how it would forward our plans in any way. There was no place to go in it except to the post where I was right under his eye.

I gave one excuse or another for coming; that I liked the tobacco he sold better than that we had brought in; that I wanted a gossip; or anything that happened to suggest itself. It exactly suited Gault's humor always to make out to be jocular and friendly, and I was willing to play that game with him. He was surrounded by such crude natures that he really enjoyed having a sophisticated person to fence with verbally.

It was useless to try to do anything with the captain or crew of the steamboat, for they were the trader's most trusted creatures. There was not the slightest chance of being able to send any word of our plight to the outside world by them. But the wireless man, Echolls, was in a different case, and he was the real object of my trips to the lion's den. I carefully concealed my purpose. I never made any attempt to seek Echolls out, but went over there time after time, hoping that one day circumstances would bring us alone together for a moment or two.

He was installing his apparatus in the back part of the store, where Gault could overlook him all day. He was a typical modern youth, self-assured, flippant and profane; but I thought his heart was in the right place. Gault and I sometimes watched him at work and engaged in facetious three-part conversations.

"Stanley," Gault would say, "you're a

lad of spirit. You ought to stay up here where a man counts for something, and isn't just a cog in the machine. Ask Mr. Lynn; he sickened of town."

"Sure," I said, "the country's all right."

"I believe you," said Stan, "but what would I do for sparkin' Saturday nights? There ain't but one good-lookin' girl at the post, and she's bespoke."

Gault looked pleased.

"There's plenty of pretty little native girls that don't expect to be taken too seriously," he said.

"They're too humble-minded," said Stan. "I like a girl that stands up to a man and gives him hell."

"Well, go out and fetch your girl in then," said Gault, "and raise a family up here where a man can call his soul his own."

He said this with a sidelong challenge in my direction, but I held my tongue.

"I wonder," drawled the young workman.

"What?" asked Gault a little sharply.

"Oh, nothin'!" he said innocently, "I was just thinkin'. I guess it's pretty much the same up here as anywhere's else."

When Gault was called away, he always took care that I went too. I made myself perfectly docile.

In the end my opportunity came as opportunities always do, in the most unexpected fashion. One Sunday morning after the steamboat had gone I resolved to try my luck at a time when everybody at the post would be idle. As my skiff touched the shore on the other side, who should come strolling along under the bank but Stan Echolls himself.

"Hello!" he called out. "Do you mind if I pull your skiff around for a bit? I'm spoilin' for exercise."

"Sure," I said, "but wait a minute. Where's Gault?"

"In church," he said. "I slipped out the door without his seein' me. To tell you the truth I'm a little fed up with the old boy. I appreciate his havin' me to sleep in his house and take my meals there and all that, but he won't let me out of his sight for a minute. What's he afraid of anyhow?"

"Just this," I said: "that you and I may get into talk."

"What the hell!" said Stan. "Why shouldn't we?"

I glanced anxiously up to the top of the bank.

"What have you been told about my partner and I?"

"Nothin'," he said, "except you had some fool notion you were going to compete with Gault here, and he was just waitin' and watchin till you fell of your own weight."

"As a matter of fact," I said, "he has made a half dozen attempts to wreck our outfit. He has even had his men shoot at us from ambush."

"Good God!" said Stan. "I thought you was friendly the way you talked."

"All a stall," I said. "My real purpose in coming over here was to get in touch with you."

"Why me? What can I do?"

"Every man here is in Gault's pay," I said. "Bound to him by the ties of fear or self-interest. I reckoned that you were a free man."

"I reckon," he drawled. "He pays me a good wage for settin' up his wireless, but apart from that I owe him nothin'. And today's Sunday," he added with a grin, "and my time's my own. Shoot! Give me the whole dope."

"I can't take the time to do that," I said with another glance up the bank. "If he finds out that we've been talking, he'll make it impossible for you to help us. But I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll write you the story. I'll bring it over here and stick it down the muzzle of the little brass cannon. You can get it out sometime when nobody's looking."

"Right!" he said.

"What I want of you is very simple," I said. "When you get your apparatus installed, will you send out a message to my friends in town?"

"Sure," he said, "any proper message. So I don't risk my own neck by it."

We shook hands on it. "That's all I could ask," I said. "You go on with your walk now, and I'll pull back across the river. Never try to look me up, nor take any notice of me when Gault is around. I promise you you shan't suffer by helping us out."

"Oh, I don't want any pay for it," he said, "if it's the decent thing to do."

I returned home with a lighter heart. This was the first little ray of hope to strike through the gloom.

VIII

IN SPITE of all obstacles and setbacks there came a day when we opened the sluice, allowing the water to course through the flume and fall on the wheel. When it began to turn we set up a cheer. To be sure, the mill was not yet connected up, but it seemed like a miracle to have accomplished even so much. For a long time we stood like children with a new toy, watching the wheel go round in a trance of pleasure.

If we had needed any further proof that all our movements were watched, in an hour or two the breeds began to ride up from the settlement singly and in couples. They stood about watching the turning wheel with "Wahs!" of astonishment. Notwithstanding their stolid demeanor, it was clear they were profoundly impressed. In spite of Gault's power there we were still, and there was our wheel turning round. Ralph and I circulated among them making what capital we could out of the occasion.

"We will pay a skin for every three bushels of grain," we told them. (This was equal to about $2.30 a bushel, whereas Gault's price was $1.50.) "We will also sell flour at three skins for two bags. You know what the prices are for other goods in our store. Trade with us and get plenty."

They listened, but made no answer.

I singled out Tom Moosa, the squat Hercules, for a more elaborate selling argument. He was a leader among the breeds, if those poor slaves could be said to have a leader.

"Tom," I said, "you work hard, you raise much grain. You have six strong sons, and in the winter they go up on the bench and trap fur. But you need a new coat, Tom, and your house is bare. Why are you poor?"

I touched something there. A glitter of resentment appeared in his eyes. But he glanced around him warily, and obstinately closed his mouth. Other breeds had gathered within hearing distance, and he was afraid if he said anything, it would be carried back to Gault. So I answered for him:

"You are poor because Gault buys cheap and sells dear. Every year he fixes prices so you will get just enough to eat and no more, so you will always owe him money. Up at the Crossing I see the people are rich. Got good clothes to wear; got iron cookstoves in their houses, and phonographs to make music all the time. Are they better men than you? No! It is because there are two stores at the Crossing. If the Company pays too little for fur the people can take it to the French Outfit. And both stores must make fair prices for the goods they sell. You will always be poor here until you get two stores."

"We not have two stores here if Hooralph is shot," said Tom sullenly.

"Then why shoot him?" I said.

He took me literally. "I not shoot him," he said indignantly. "None of these people shoot him. Ask across the river who shoot him."

I believed him.

I could not tell if I had made any progress as a result of this and similar talks. Later, when the breeds had departed, I happened to hear Joe Cardinal say wistfully:

"Louis Providence's son and Charley Mistatim's daughter goin' get married tomorrow. Dance tomorrow night in Charley's house."

This started me thinking. "Maybe this is a kind of left-handed overture of friendship," I said. "They would hardly mention it if they did not think we might come."

Ralph looked up. "It would be just like them to say it to Joe if they meant it for us," he said. "Always indirect."

We talked it over.

"By Gad! we'd have them all there together!" cried Ralph. "What a chance to give them a spiel!"

"Risky for you," I suggested. "Better let me go."

He merely smiled stubbornly.

"Then we'll go together," I said.

PICTURE a log-walled interior about twenty by thirty, lighted by a single little kerosene lamp at one end. All the furniture had been run outside to make room for the dancing, except one bedstead which served as a sort of grandstand for the old women of the party. The stove was cheerfully performing its office out in the yard and a refreshment counter had been erected beside it. Down one side of the room the men squatted on their heels with their Stetsons pulled over their faces, and opposite them the girls on an improvised bench giggling and whispering behind their hands like girls anywhere. Under the lamp sat the bride alone, her head shrouded in a shawl. Decorum required that she be overcome with shame on this occasion. The bridegroom was not allowed inside the cabin at all, but might be seen from time to time peering wistfully through a window.

There was a continuous clumping on the plank floor as successive couples came up for the Red River jig, and the air was heavy with a fog of mixed tobacco smoke and dust. The breeds who ordinarily wear moccasins must have boots to dance in. Dancing would not be dancing unless they could make a racket on the floor. The fiddler, Big Albert, likewise stamped with his feet while he played. His tune, which consisted of about six bars repeated ad lib., had been going on for half an hour continuously. In the Red River jig, the national dance north of fifty-three, the couples spell each other on the floor, and the dance only ends with the complete exhaustion of the fiddler.

The coming of Ralph and I had seemed to lay a heavy constraint on the party in the beginning. Still I think they were glad to have us there. The presence of white men lent a certain éclat to the affair. Gault disdained to mix in such company. We had brought suitable gifts for bride and bridegroom, and a box of cigars to hand around. We made ourselves agreeable and kept in the background, biding our time. It was a mild summer's night, and one by one the young couples drifted outside. Presently we should have just the audience we wanted, the fathers, the solid men, the landowners. There were no doubt spies of Gault's among them, but that had to be chanced. Under the influence of sociability their usual stolid, inscrutable masks were cast aside.

"It is tonight or never," Ralph whispered to me.

Big Albert ended with a final scrape, and shuffled out of the door in search of refreshments. Before anybody else had time to follow, Ralph drifted out into the center of the room, and started telling a funny story in a casual manner, filling his pipe meanwhile. The breeds are great storytellers, but they have no art, their stories are only endless detailed recitals of daily happenings. Thus Ralph was able to play with them, and his story with its unexpected ending, went over big.

Ralph wasted no words but launched directly into the middle of his speech. But it was not like a speech; he used none of the forensic aids, the organ tones or sawing of the air; it was just talking. He sauntered about, addressing this person and that, gesticulating with his pipe. You might have thought it was the perfection of acting, but it was nothing of the sort. The lad was so keyed up he had forgotten all consciousness of self; he was speaking straight from the heart. I shall never forget it.

"Nobody asked me to come tonight," he began. (This was for the benefit of possible spies) "But I came anyhow. I know everybody here. It's not the first dance I have come to on this side of the river. When I worked up here we were friends. I could go to any house and be sure of a shake of the hand and a friendly smile. When I went away all said they were sorry. 'You are a good fellow, Hooralph,' they said. 'We are your friends.' But when I come back again they are not glad. They give me hard looks. What has changed them? I come to trade with them. Is that unfriendly?"

He paused a moment to give this a chance to sink in, then took a new line. He unconsciously fell into their own idiom. "I'll tell you another funny story directly. I know plenty. And Bob Lynn here, he can tell stories better than I can. He's a lawyer. It's his business to tell stories. (More laughter) It is good to hear men laugh. I have not heard much laughing since I came back here. Up at the Crossing the people have a party nearly every night and laugh and sing and make good friends. But down here every family stays at home and looks sour at its neighbors. Men's hearts are frozen. They cannot speak what is in their hearts. They are afraid.

"Well, I will speak out. I will break the ice. There is a cloud of lies here. The truth must be spoken. Gault divides you with lies. His spies are here now. Well, let them go tell him I said so. I am not afraid. It is the truth and all know it. One man he bribes, and another man he poisons with lies against his neighbor. So no man knows whom he can trust. Each man stands alone, and so Gault makes slaves of you one by one. That's why there's so little laughing here. Only free men can laugh out loud and enjoy life. Slaves are always afraid.

"What do you work for anyhow? It doesn't do you any good. The harder you work the more Gault gets out of it. You don't get anything except food enough to go on working some more. When you die all you have to leave your sons is a debt. You will never be allowed to work off that debt, nor your sons, nor your sons' sons. When there is a big crop of wheat Gault pays you less, but when the summer frost kills your wheat you have to pay for store goods just the same. Meanwhile Gault grows richer every year. He can't lose. You are Gault's slaves and every child you bear is another slave for Gault. How long are you going to stand it?"

An absolute silence had fallen upon the room. Many of the people outside were crowding the doorway. The electric quality of the silence was the only thing that gave me hope Ralph was making headway with them. They seem to have suspended their very breathing. From their faces you could read nothing, for all had drawn on their masks of impassivity. The men glanced down their noses; the women made themselves look merely stupid.

"This is a free country!" Ralph's voice rang out. "You're not obliged to be slaves. Do you want to know how to free yourselves? I will tell you. Join together. By yourselves you are weak, but joined together you will be strong—stronger than Gault! Join together, all you grain growers; make a club; call it the Good Hope Grange, and deal with the trader as one man who owns all the grain."

I saw them glance at each other as if this brilliant idea had for the first time been suggested to them.

"Now is your chance to free yourselves," cried Ralph. "My outfit is here. I have everything you need: tea, sugar, beans, meat. If you help Gault to smash me, all right. You make slaves of yourselves, this year, next year and all the years, for nobody else will bring in an outfit. 'What is the use?' men will say. 'The people at Fort Good Hope are slaves. Gault carries them in his pocket.' Now is the time! There is a big crop and I offer a big price for it. You will have credit with me instead of a debt. You can order anything you want from the outside. You can put your credit in the post office and let it stay there until the next summer that you are frozen out. The government will pay you interest on your credit. When you have credit you can tell any man to go to hell. That is freedom! That's all I have to say."

In the pause that followed one could feel the different currents pulling. In the crowd, a few were for Ralph; some wavered; while the slavish spirits sneered. The decision teetered this way and that, and I held my breath in suspense. I was afraid to add a word to Ralph's fine outburst for fear of spoiling it. Then Tom Moosa jumped up, his dark face working with emotion. One would never have supposed the wooden man to be capable of such passion.

"Hooralph speak true," he cried. "We are slaves! Gault all tam mak' trouble between us wit' lies. Gault hire my two sons wit' big credit for to smash Hooralph's mill. Hooralph t'ink I send them. *Nomoya!* I put them out my house. I say go across the river to your master. I am poor but Gault can't hire me to do bad." He whirled around and faced his fellow farmers. "Men, join with me," he cried, "and we will be free! There will be good feeling and friends here instead of moch lies and fear. Join with me, and sell our grain to Hooralph."

Old Louis Providence stood up, his sparse beard quivering. "I am old," he faltered. "Soon I die. Not want die lak a slave, me. I join wit' you, Tom Moosa. I sell my grain to Hooralph."

Charley Mistatim followed, and Benoosis Cardinal. When the four Trudeau brothers came in, the thing became a stampede.

"Here is Lynn!" cried Tom Moosa, half beside himself with excitement. "He is lawyer. Let him mak' a paper for all to sign. Mak' it strong. Mak' it strong! So all know none can break away."

A little table was fetched in from outside, and I drew up a brief contract on a clean piece of wrapping-paper that appeared from somewhere. It was then spread upon the table, and the rude figures stepped up one after another and solemnly affixed their crosses. The act had a mystical significance to them, and their dark faces were rapt. Not much danger that this contract would be broken, I thought. Then Big Albert fetched in his fiddle again, and the dancing recommenced. By those who disappeared from the party we knew our enemies. However, every grain grower on the north side of the river had signed the contract. There was already a lightness, a friendliness in the atmosphere that had not been there before.

IX

IN ORDER to guard against accidents the whole crowd of our new customers accompanied us back to our camp that night. Gifts of horses were pressed upon us, but these we had to refuse for the moment, since we had no stabling. For additional helpers we only had to pick and choose. Unfortunately what we most needed was a mechanic, and the breeds were completely innocent of all mechanical knowledge. However we took four or five additional guards for the plant, and went to sleep with easier minds than on any night since we had landed from our raft.

In the morning, not being of the slightest assistance in a mechanical capacity, I went over to Gault's store. I was perfectly sure that Gault would not take this blow lying down, and I thought it would be just as well to forearm ourselves with information as to what he was going to do about it. I felt no little trepidation at the thought of facing him, for I expected to find him in a black rage. You can imagine how I was taken aback then, when he greeted me at the door of the store with a beaming smile. I saw that it was a real smile, too. I experienced a horrible sinking of the heart. He must have known every word of what had taken place the night before. What was he saving up his sleeve?

"Come on in!" he cried. "Got something to show you."

In the back of the store I found Stan Echolls sitting at a table tapping out a message on a telegraph key, while the sending apparatus buzzed and crackled.

"She's working!" cried Gault gleefully. "They're taking it in town as fast as Stan can send."

Well, this was interesting, but I could not see how it would help him with the revolt we had stirred up among the breeds.

"Fine," I said. "I'll send a message out to my chief clerk, if I may."

"Any time, any time," he said grandly.

I had no illusions about that permission, though.

Stan Echolls gave me a meaning glance which suggested that the contents of the long message he was sending would be important for me to know. But how was I to learn it with Gault at my elbow? It suddenly occurred to the trader that there might be some danger in letting me stand there.

"Do you understand the Morse code?" he asked.

"No," I said. "Do you?"

"Not yet," he answered; "but Stan is teaching me."

Perhaps he thought I was lying. At any rate he led me outside the store. Like the false wretch he was, he was especially friendly to me this morning, simply because we had done him a serious injury the night before. He insisted on my coming to lunch at his house. This I was glad to do, since I was bound to learn what was going on. First, however, he must show me around a bit.

We entered the millhouse behind the store. Sashermah, his miller, was oiling and tightening up the process mill, which was much like ours, but larger. At a nod from Gault he turned on the power, and the whole thing began to function smoothly, the wheels turning, the bolting frames weaving back and forth. However, I hid my envy.

"Getting ready for the wheat," said Gault with a bland smile. "They're starting to thresh it at Tom Moosa's place this morning. They say it's a bumper crop. Fifty bushels to the acre."

This piece of insolence of course was to provoke me to a reply, but I held my tongue. I had come to get information not to give it. I was worried.

When we started over to the house, I said: "Where's Echolls?"

"He's too busy to leave the key," said Gault. "We'll send his lunch over."

In the yellow clapboarded mansion, I was shown into the bathroom to wash my hands. Fancy finding a porcelain tub and washbasin, hot and cold water, and shower bath, seven hundred miles from town! I had no sooner entered the room than there was a discreet tap, and Eelip Trudeau handed in a clean towel. Good old Eelip! I could almost have loved that breed. When I shook out the towel a note fluttered to the floor. I pounced on it and read:

> *Gault is sending out a list of the debts owed him by all the farmers. His agent is to swear out writs against them, and a sheriff's officer is bringing in the papers by airplane tomorrow and will attach the grain as fast as it is threshed. The total is about four thousand dollars. The name of the pilot who is bringing him in is Lieut. Basil Woodman. If you want me to send out a message, stick it in the cannon, and I'll get it while Gault is having his after-lunch nap.*
> *S. E.*

For a moment I was staggered by the simplicity and ingenuity of this scheme. Then I thought: "Four thousand dollars! I can pay that and still make a profit on the grain. I will settle the attachment myself." Then the uncomfortable thought came to me: "But how? With checks? Gault may refuse checks. He would be within his rights because checks are not legal tender. What is legal tender? Specie . . ." At this point I started writing a message to my chief clerk on a page on my notebook.

> *Nathaniel Starrett,*
> *c/o Robert Lynn,*
> *Prince George, Atha.*
> *Draw five thousand dollars in gold immediately. Look up Lieut. Basil Woodman who is to fly to Fort Good Hope tomorrow and arrange with him to bring me the money. Vitally important. Ask him, if possible, to put the money in my hands without the knowledge of John Gault. Regards.*
> *Robert Lynn.*

Tearing out the leaf and putting it in my pocket for the time being, I went down to lunch. Of lunch I need say nothing. Miss Mary Cranleigh was not present, but the Reverend Edward, her brother, was—a virtuous and well-meaning little man of weak character, a perfect tool in Gault's hands. When I inquired for his sister he said she was very much better, but thought it better for the present to keep to her room.

Afterwards Gault and I walked out of the house together. It was a delicious afternoon with a sky like palest turquoise. Oh, the exquisite clarity of the northern summer sky! It was the most natural thing in the world to sit down on the bench at the foot of the flagstaff and survey the wide scene. Across the river we could see the figures of the threshing gang like insects, and a cloud of straw puffing out of the machine. I suppose our thoughts as we watched it were similar: Who was going to get the grain?

I had chosen the end of the bench that had the little cannon beside it. I palmed the message, and it was a simple matter to thrust it in the muzzle while we talked. Shortly afterwards I set off in my skiff, and Gault returned to the house presumably to take his nap. I noticed a breed watched from the shore to make sure I did not return. When I got home I did not tell Ralph what had happened. I thought the disappointment would be too sickening if it chanced that Gault's plan should work and mine fail.

X

DURING my absence they had succeeded in starting the mill. A trial bag of wheat fetched up from the threshing machine had been poured into one end of it, and honest-to-goodness flour had issued from the other end. To be sure, it was not the snowy article we are accustomed to in cities, but was of a brownish consistency. However it was just as good as that turned out by Gault's mill. Everybody was elated. The lad sat at the door smoking his pipe with an expression of peace in his worn face. I trembled to think of what the next day would bring.

Right after breakfast I went down to the threshing at Tom Moosa's place. Gault was there with his boat's crew and other servants, a full dozen in all. He had come across the river of course, to watch me, just as I had come down to watch him. This morning I ignored his presence. To have laughed and talked with him would have suggested to the simple breeds that I was false to them. He and his men loafed about joking among themselves, while the breeds worked on with never a glance in their direction.

The threshing machine was a small one and of an old pattern. Power was supplied by a boiler mounted on wheels and having a tall, attenuated smokestack. There were a good many stops for repairs and the output of grain was small; nevertheless the pile of full bags constantly grew bigger. Tom Moosa came to me and said, with a gleam in his dark eye, "I hitch up wagon now, and start carry it to the mill. I guess that give Gault a slap in the eye."

I considered. It was undoubtedly to prevent this that Gault had brought so many men across the river. Well, most of the breeds had gathered to help with the threshing, and we outnumbered the trader's party two to one. Still, I didn't want a fight. A fight would have fatally confused the issue, and I wanted to keep it clean cut.

"No," I answered. "Don't start sending the grain up until you have finished threshing."

Already word of the airplane was circulating from mouth to mouth. Gault's "voices in the air" were speaking to the city, it was said. Gault had ordered one of the man birds to fly to them that day, bringing oranges, lemons, bananas and other strange fruits of the South which had never been seen at Fort Good Hope. The old men shook their heads ominously. To fly in the sky was to fly in the face of God himself. God would certainly strike the man bird down. Everybody worked with the tail of an eye on the sky.

At dinnertime Gault took his men back across the river. For the rest of us, dinner under a shelter of leaves outside Tom Moosa's shack was a hilarious affair. A young steer had been slaughtered for the threshing and everybody had as much beef as they could gorge, the most prized of all foods. There was a freedom and jollity about the gathering that I had never seen among the breeds. Only my breast was heavy with anxiety.

After dinner I sent a boy up to Ralph to tell him that Gault had summoned in an airplane and that he had better come down. After all, Ralph was their leader and he must be present whatever happened. He came, and mounting the platform, did his turn in feeding sheaves to the machine.

Gault brought his men back.

TOM MOOSA farmed a single field stretching long and narrow from the river back towards the hills. It was as flat as a board. His log shack with its sod roof sprouting bravely, was built on the river bank, his little stable behind it, and engine and thresher connected by a long belt, were set up beside the stable. About fifteen men were engaged in tending the machine, in hauling grain from the field, in stacking straw. As many more stood about, spelling their comrades from time to time, and there was a small crowd of women and children looking on. Gault and his men, distinguished by their better clothes, lounged a little apart from the others. The wideness and emptiness of the view all around seemed to dwarf the little scene of human activity. It was all bathed in the marvelous clarity of the high latitudes.

In the middle of the afternoon when the last loads of Tom Moosa's sheaves were being drawn to the threshing machine, a disturbing hum made itself heard. Men looked at their neighbors to see if they had heard it. Suddenly all work ceased, the power was shut off, the teams left standing in the fields, and all hands stampeded for the river bank. How strange it was to see them seized by a common impulse. It was known that the bird would light on the water. Presently it could be seen, a tiny form moving swiftly against the blue, and loud cries of fear and wonder broke from the crowd. Many of the women fell on their knees, the men's faces were pale and tormented with agitation, the children hid their faces in their mothers' skirts. A man's voice said, awe-struck:

"He too far 'way. Not see us. Fly to the north and die."

Another replied: "*Nomoya!* He see the yellow grain fields."

Sure enough, when the plane was over our heads, it tipped and began to swing around, dropping fast. The watching people quite beside themselves, groaned and cried out insensately. As the plane grew bigger, one then another yielding suddenly to panic, ducked and ran madly to the shack for shelter, exactly like chickens at the alarm of a hawk. But once inside they ran out again, torn between the desire for shelter and the desire to see. It would have been funny at any other time.

Finally the plane, immense now, swooped low over our heads, and all except the three white men cast themselves flat with cries of despair. But instantly heads popped up again to follow the marvelous creature. She made a perfect landing, lighting in the water as gently as a swan and shooting upstream, sending a cloud of spray to either side. The roar of the engine ceased. The two men in the cockpit stood up and waved their hands.

Gault dispatched his boat's crew to tow her over to our side where all could see. Once she lay quiet on the water, the breeds like the children they were, quickly lost their fear of her. It could now be seen that she was just another man-made thing with an engine, sails, and two little pontoons to keep her afloat. Those who had been most frightened explained her parts in confident voices to their fellows.

Ralph and I drew together.

"What does this mean, really?" he said.

"Gault has sent out for a sheriff's officer to attach the grain," I said.

"Good God! Why didn't you tell me?" he exclaimed, paling.

"I didn't want to alarm you unnecessarily," I said. "I hope to pay off the attachments."

The plane was anchored in the stream near to our side and was further secured by a line to the shore. Everybody was down on the beach now. Gault's gig brought one of the men ashore, evidently the sheriff's officer; the pilot remained aboard yet a while, setting all to rights. Gault and the passenger shook hands at the edge of the water, and the latter handed a sheaf of legal papers to the trader. Gault then, with characteristic insolence, brought him over to us.

"Meet Mr. Buell, gentlemen," he said with assumed heartiness. "Sheriff's officer from town."

He didn't get any rise out of me. "Delighted," I cried. "And how did you leave everything?"

After a little desultory conversation, Gault suddenly changed his manner. He became the master. "Come on, boys! Get back to work!" he cried to the breeds. "You've seen everything. You'll burn out your boiler if you don't put some water in it."

Everybody streamed reluctantly up the bank, and work began again. The engine whistled and the flywheel began to revolve. The teams brought the last loads of sheaves to the thresher. Gault urged them on. "Look sharp, men! I've sent across the river for my sturgeon head. This grain must be lodged in the mill before supper."

Tom Moosa, who was driving a single horse hitched to a sling which gathered up the straw and drew it to the stack, dropped his lines and walked up to the trader. "Gault," he said, with a wooden face, "if you send for sturgeon head she got go back empty. I send my grain to 'nother mill this year."

Gault, who was expecting this, smiled hatefully: "Sorry, Tom," he drawled, "but I have a prior lien on the grain." He drew the sheaf of papers from his pocket, and running over them, picked out the one that bore Tom Moosa's name. He flipped it open, and with a pin from his lapel, affixed it to one of the full bags of grain. The breeds watched his actions with intense interest, and work slowed down again. The paper had a disconcertingly official look.

Gault then beckoned to the sheriff's officer.

"Mr. Buell," he said, "please explain to this man what the paper means."

The officer did so in a voice that could be heard by all. It was pitiful to see how the dark faces fell; all the steam seemed to go out of them at once; all the jollity and self-assurance. As for Tom Moosa, he flung his hands up above his head in a single, fine gesture, turned on his heel, and marched off to his house without a word. Gault grinned over at us in triumph, but Ralph, who had mounted his little platform, was unconcernedly feeding sheaves into the machine, and I smiled blandly back.

When no one was looking at me I slipped down the bank again. Gault's crew was bringing the pilot ashore. He was a handsome young fellow, with all the nerve of the popular aviator. But my heart sank when he stood up to step ashore. He had no satchel, no bundle; his hands were empty. It was a sickening moment of disappointment.

I offered him my hand.

"I am Robert Lynn," I said. "I had hoped——"

"Oh, Mr. Lynn," he said at once, "I've got——"

"Ssh!" I said. "Wait till the men are out of hearing."

But what a sudden reaction I underwent!

My heart rebounded like a rubber ball. All of a sudden I was overflowing with bliss.

Gault's men had started to pull across the river to fetch the sturgeon head.

"Where is it?" I asked in wonder.

He grinned at my breathlessness.

"In a belt around my waist. Feels like it weighs a ton!"

"Can you slip it to me without their seeing?" I asked. "Keep your back turned to the boat."

He undid the fastenings of the belt, and it passed from around his waist directly into my pocket. A man ten yards off could not have seen what was taking place.

"You go up and mix with the crowd," I said. "I'll see you later."

I climbed the bank lower down, and making my way around to the back of Tom Moosa's house, stuck my head in an open window. Tom was sitting there with his elbows planted on his knees and his head gripped between his hands, the picture of complete dejection. I softly called him, and he came wonderingly to the window. I had got my penknife out and was cutting the stitches in the canvas belt.

"Hold out your hands, Tom!" I said.

Into his horny palms I poured a little golden flood. His eyes almost started from his head.

"Gold!" he muttered. "Gold money! Oh God! Oh God! Where that come from?"

His debt was only four hundred dollars. I counted out twenty twenty-dollar pieces, just a good handful.

"Give that to Gault in satisfaction of your debt," I said. "Under the law he is obliged to take it."

His eyes gleamed. He said no more, but turned towards the door.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Let me get around by the barn so I can see the fun."

I rejoined the threshing gang coming from the direction opposite to the river bank. Gault would guess of course where the money came from, and how it came, but he would not know. He could not prove that either young Echolls or the aviator had played him a trick.

I think it gave me the most delicious pleasure of my life to see Tom Moosa, with a perfectly wooden face, march up to Gault and say: "Hold out your hand."

"What does this mean?" demanded Gault scowling and stepping back. All work stopped.

"I pay you my debt," said Tom. And since Gault did not hold out his hand, the breed counted the big, glittering yellow pieces from one hand to the other. The breeds gasped at the sight and jumping down from threshing machine and wagons came crowding up to see. The belt whirled unheeded. All had heard of gold money, but it had never been seen at Fort Good Hope. All cried in awe just as Tom had done. "Gold! Gold money! My God!" It created almost as great a sensation as the airplane.

Gault's pale face turned yellowish with rage, and he showed two perfect sets of false teeth. "I wont take it!" he snarled. "The grain is mine."

I could imagine the bitterness that poisoned his soul at that moment. Hoisted with his own petard—the airplane.

"You got take it," said Tom Moosa coolly. "It is the law. Ask the law man."

Gault turned to go away, but the breed caught his pocket, and pulling it open, dropped the gold pieces inside.

"I got plenty witnesses," said Tom calmly.

The breed was magnificent. He went to the piled bags of grain and pulling off the writ, tore it into small pieces.

"Hey, Allie," he cried to one of his helpers, "put the body on your wagon and load this grain for Hooralph's mill."

"Yeah, boys! All together. Give him a cheer!" yelled Ralph from the top of the threshing machine.

The idea of cheering was new to those stolid creatures, but Ralph's example instantly infected them. They raised a tremendous yell, and caps were sent spinning high into the air. That, it appears, is one of the most primitive of human gestures.

XI

NEXT day the threshing outfit moved to the adjoining farm. All day and every day thereafter the wagons hauled the bags of grain to our mill, and all day the water-wheel turned and a thin stream of flour poured into the waiting bags. The farce of attaching the grain was not gone through with again. Gault pocketed the money with an ill grace and sent the sheriff's officer back to town in the airplane. That expedition must have cost him a pretty penny. The cream of the jest lay in the fact that the gold was perfectly useless to him up there. All he could was to send it out to town again.

They threshed the grain much quicker than we could grind it of course, but we had made our millhouse big enough to store the grain. Meanwhile with plenty of willing helpers, we ran up a store. We built this as a sort of porch to the millhouse; that is to say, the mill could only be entered through the store. It was a little inconvenient, but this was more than made up for by the added security it gave to our precious mill, and to our grain.

I went no more to Gault's post. To tell the truth I didn't care to face him after what had happened. However, there was plenty of passing back and forth across the river, and we had no lack of rumors as to what was going on. Some said Gault had ordered in a great store of flour from outside. However this could hardly be, for September was now at hand, and the nights already frosty. Even with his steamboat he could not possibly get in any more goods before the freeze up. All the flour in the country, hence the whole key to the trading situation was in our hands.

They said that after the first bitterness of the disappointment passed, Gault resumed his usual bland and unconcerned demeanor. He gave his friends to understand that the fight was not by any means over, and that they would do well to stick to him a while. These vague threats did not trouble us, but I *was* worried by the fact that Gault made us no offer—not that we had the slightest intention of selling out to him. But I figured that our outfit was now worth a thumping big sum to him. If he allowed us to trade during the winter while he sat idle, it would be a blow to his prestige from which he could never hope to recover. Why then did he make us no offer? It suggested that he must have some scheme for eliminating us at a less cost.

One afternoon as the breeds were threshing the last of the grain, the Kakisa Indians rode in from their hunting grounds, which lay along the banks of an unexplored river, a hundred miles to the northwest. Every year just before the snow flew, Ralph told me, they came to get their winter's supply of flour and other store goods. Since this was a full month before their time, it was not hard to guess that Gault had sent for them. They set up their teepees in our little valley, upon the pretext that it was the only place convenient to water, grass and wood.

More unpleasant neighbors it would have been impossible to find. A remote tribe, still living in a wild state, intermarriage had ruined them physically—and morally also, if one could judge by their mean, ugly faces and filthy habits. Nevertheless they were valuable to the trader since their country was the richest in fur of any in the whole Northwest. There were between seventy-five and a hundred men in the party, and a few women who had been brought along to do the work; no children. They had plenty of horses, but sorry beasts, spoiled like their masters by inbreeding.

They had no sooner dismounted than they came swarming to the store. Ralph and I took up our position outside the door, myself with a little ledger, and we made it clear that any man who desired to trade with us must give his name and pedigree. Ralph knew many of their faces, but could not remember their uncouth names, which as far as I could make out sounded like: Ahchoogah, Mahtsonza, Etzooah, and so on. It was said that no white man had ever succeeded in mastering their language. It resembled a combination of gargling and sneezing. None of them could speak English excepting Ahkahkeek, their chief and conjure man. So Ahkahkeek had to act as intermediary.

In all my life I have never seen so strange and repulsive a being. He was not a Kakisa at all, but a wanderer who had somehow succeeded in usurping the headship of this simple tribe. Picture a smallish man of uncertain age, with greasy black hair hanging to his shoulders in strings, and partly covering his face. There was a tinge of yellow in his skin which suggested negro ancestry. Though the days were still warm, he wore a filthy blanket coat which was hung all over with fantastic bits of rag, string, bark, et cetera, for charms. He showed a perpetual grin, revealing hideously blackened and decayed teeth. Ralph assured me that his antic behavior was only a cover for a sharp and cunning mind. Ahkahkeek knew exactly what he was about.

Ahkahkeek stood at the door of the store with a mean and cringing air, making believe to give us the names of his men. From the shouts of laughter which rose behind him we quickly realized that he was only pulling our leg, so we changed the procedure. Every man who desired to trade with us must give us the print of his thumb, we announced. When they perceived that we were not so easily to be fooled, it sobered them a little.

All the members of the tribe having been registered at last, we allowed them to enter the store a few at a time. They were allowed to look at everything, and the prices were given, but we made them keep hands off. It was announced that this year every man would be restricted to the bare necessities of his family, but that when they went back all who had behaved themselves would be given a present. In the spring when they brought their fur to the store, a good hunter would be allowed to take what he wanted. Ralph said Gault had never allowed them any luxuries.

From the moment of their coming, the situation became ominous for us. They crowded around our door; they ceaselessly milled around the building, poking for scraps like outcast dogs. There was always a shifty eye at the windows, and one could not go out without tumbling over them. It was impossible to tell what was going on behind their witless red faces. As far as I could judge they were as unstable and crack-brained as a troop of monkeys; laughing uproariously one moment, and viciously quarreling the next. If they had been white, one would have termed them neurotic. As a result of inbreeding it seemed as if their very personalities had disintegrated.

Hourly matters grew worse. For one thing there was an ancient feud between the Kakisas and the breeds of the settlement, and the latter overawed by the numbers of the redskins, soon began to drift home. Only two or three of the bolder spirits such as Tom Moosa, Benoosis Cardinal and Charley Mistatim stuck by us. Next day we learned that Ahkahkeek had been over to Gault's store, where the trader had made much of him, and had invited him to help himself. The language was a fatal bar. We had no way of communicating with them except through Ahkahkeek who was a scoundrel. It soon became clear from their sidelong, hateful looks that somebody was whipping up their passions by telling them preposterous lies about us. There was no way in which we could combat it.

I began to appreciate the full ingenuity of Gault's scheme. Once having put the idea into the Kakisas' heads that we were fair game, he had nothing to do but sit safe in his store, and let matters take their course. Whatever outrages the ignorant savages might commit could not possibly be brought home to him. If necessary he would have no hesitation in sacrificing Ahkahkeek later, but I suspected that Ahkahkeek would be found clever enough to keep his skirts clear, too. The maddening part of it was that though I saw from the first what was going to happen, there was nothing I could do about it. By our ignorance of the Kakisa tongue, Gault had us completely sewed up.

On the second night after their coming, the worst happened. The days were rapidly shortening now, and it was dark before eight o'clock. A couple of hundred yards from our buildings they built a big fire on the flat ground alongside the stream and began to dance around it and to sing their unearthly chants. Higher and higher mounted the fire, and wilder and more unrestrained the leaping and the yelling. There was a different quality in the sound tonight, a frenzied, bestial quality. Finally we could doubt no longer. Against the red firelight we could see the jugs being tipped up. Somebody had furnished them with whisky. The effect of raw spirits on their unstable natures can be imagined. Most of them were armed with Winchesters.

We were eight in the store, all armed of course, and with unlimited ammunition. But my heart sunk dreadfully at the prospect of bloodshed. I am a man of peace. We had five small windows to guard, three to the east, one to the south, and one to the west. Our walls were of stout logs: the roof of poles was covered with sods. Our chief danger was from fire, but we hoped that the Indians would be reluctant to use that weapon, owing to the flour stored inside, and all the luxuries in the store that they coveted.

The south window was in the millhouse. It overlooked the fire, and we gathered around it, watching and waiting for the first threatening move against us. They were still fetching down wood from the hills, and the flames were leaping fifteen eet in the air. Against this blaze the ancing figures were fantastically silouetted, leaping and flinging themselves bout in the wildest abandon. The air as filled with their bloodcurdling, inuman cries. It was like a scene out of he "Inferno." We could see them turn owards us with threatening gestures and ell insults, presumably. Thus they orked themselves up to the point of atacking us. We could see them fighting ver the whisky jugs, and could only pray hat the spirit might be spilled on the round.

While we were watching this, conceive f our amazement when if by magic the hole scene was suddenly stilled. The pringing figures came to rest, the yelling oices were silenced. We saw them all raw slowly to one side of the fire in ringing attitudes as if struck with fear r awe. And no wonder, for around the ther side of the fire came an unearthly gure in white, moving strangely all of a iece, like an automaton. It was the gure of a woman shrunk into an unatural attitude, one hand upraised and utspread, her frozen face turned towards he fire. Not a flesh-and-blood woman, ut a wraith, a visitor from some other orld. Sceptical worldling that I am, a ry of awe was forced from me. The ark-skinned members of our party fell n their knees. Only Ralph knew her in he first glance. With a cry of alarm he an wildly for the door of the store. I ollowed him.

When we opened it she fell in half faintg. It was Mary Cranleigh. Ralph ught her up in his arms.

"Mary, Mary, Mary!" he cried in maze. "You crossed the river alone!"

"I had to," she said. "I had to tell ou . . . there is a plot . . . Oh, I must e strong. . . ."

I hastened to fetch her water.

She presently went on in a firmer voice: "Listen Ralph; when you told me Gault as a bad man, I was very angry. But was frightened, too. I kept putting off he wedding, though I would not admit hings to myself. One little thing after nother confirmed my suspicions. Eelip arned me that he was a bad man to omen. Tonight when that horrible Inian came, I was sure something was rong. I stole downstairs and listened outside the library door. I couldn't understand everything that was said, but little by little I pieced things together. I learned that there was a plot. Gault had furnished whisky to the Indians to drive them crazy so they would attack you. And Ahkahkeek was going to stay on our side of the river all night, so he couldn't be blamed for what might happen. When I heard this I knew I had to come to you. I didn't know if it would do any good, but—but I wanted to be with you!"

They kissed. In that moment Ralph forgot Indians and everything else.

"We suspected it already," I groaned. "What can we do?"

The breeds had gathered around us. Ralph suddenly raised his head; his eyes were shining.

"Gault and Ahkakeek are alone in the big house," he said. "No men servants sleep there. By God, if we could steal over there and kidnap them; fetch them back here as hostages! Who will volunteer with me?"

My heart sank; but of course as the only other white man present I could not hold back.

"I will," I said quickly.

"And I," said Tom Moosa grimly. "I owe Gault somet'ing, me!"

"Three of us will be enough," said Ralph. "The others must stay here to hold off the savages until we can get back."

XII

THE next two or three hours passed like a fearful phantasmagoria. It comes back to me in detached pictures. Things happened so quickly I had no time to be afraid, no time indeed to think of anything. I discovered that my fears were mostly of the imagination; faced by an actual situation I acted instinctively, as we all do.

We crept out of the house on our bellies in order to avoid attracting the attention of the Indians. Mary was wrapped in a dark overcoat of mine. We had to take her with us, not caring to expose her to the risk of an attack while we were gone. The five breeds were left on guard with orders to shoot into the air when first attacked, and to shoot to kill if the redskins still came on.

The Indians, blinded by their own fire, never saw us leave. We climbed the side hill and circled around them. They were beginning to dance and sing again, but with less spirit than before. They had had a scare. Descending to the flat beyond them, we found their horses everywhere. It was their custom to turn them out hobbled and with halters on for convenience in catching them. We cut the hobbles of four horses, and mounting bareback rode for the river as fast as the wretched beasts would carry us.

There were plenty of boats. A few minutes later we landed on the other shore. It was now about ten o'clock. The post was quiet except for a sound of singing accompanied by a banjo, which came from the breed quarters at the back of the square. Well, the more noise they made the better for us. We went straight for the big house. There was still a light in the library window. While Mary hid around the corner of the wall, I knocked on the door.

Gault opened it. Without a sound the three of us charged in and bore him down flat on his back. He shouted once, before we stopped his windpipe. Somebody kicked the door shut. Leaving the other two to handle him, I ran on into the library where I was just in time to prevent Ahkahkeek from slipping out by a side door. He was not a formidable antagonist. I held him until Ralph and Tom, having gagged and tied up Gault, came to do a like office for the redskin. We had brought ropes for the purpose. We made a good bit of noise, and Eelip and another breed woman were quickly attracted to the scene. They made no offer to interfere. Whether they were really paralyzed with fear or not, I can't say; but they did not run out to fetch help.

In less than five minutes after we had entered, we were on our way out again. Ralph had Gault on his back, and I held his heels, for he still struggled, all tied up as he was. Never will I forget the desperate, raging glare in his black eyes. Tom carried the smaller figure unaided. Mary was waiting on the porch.

"You can go upstairs and go to bed now," said Ralph. "You will be safe here."

"No, no!" she cried hysterically. "I am going back. I will not be separated from you again, now I have found you."

This could hardly have been pleasant hearing for Gault's ears.

On the other side of the river we got additional horses out of Tom Moose's corral and, tying our prisoners on their backs, rode hard for the hills. The two men must have received a cruel shaking during those three miles, but we could not stop to consider that. When we came in sight of the big fire—not so big now—we made a detour and climbed the hill. Looking down on the fire from the hillside, we were surprised to see no leaping figures around it, to hear no yells. Was the trouble all over then? We paused on the slope above the dark mass of our buildings to reconnoiter before riding down.

Suddenly out of the darkness below, rose a yell, followed by a flash and a report; then another and another, a sort of scattering volley in a semicircle. It was succeeded by a suffocating silence; no answering shots from the house. Then another hell of yelling and shooting. My heart sickened at the thought of those death-dealing plugs of lead.

We hung in indecision for a moment. We could not abandon our dark-skinned friends in the house, of course, but on the other hand we had the girl with us. That always shakes a man's nerve.

However, Ralph said firmly: "We'll charge them. They can't stand against it. And in the dark there's little danger. When I give the word, ride like hell!"

Mary was still wrapped in my dark coat. Ralph led her horse, while Tom had the horse to which John Gault was tied, and I had Ahkahkeek's.

"Now!" said Ralph softly, and we clapped heels to our horses' ribs and charged down the grassy slope, yelling like demons. I'm sure we sounded more like six hundred than six. At any rate the dark shadows in the grass broke and ran silently. My horse's shoulder struck one of them and sent him spinning. It was a madly exhilarating moment.

"Joe! Joe!" shouted Ralph, and the door of the house was flung open as we rode up. The girl was thrust inside, and hastily cutting our prisoners free of their horses, we passed them in after her. Smacking the horses to make them run off, we got inside. The door slammed and e bars dropped into place. We were safe. All was well inside.

Joe Cardinal said in his stolid fashion: hey shoot at windows. Not come near, I close shutters and let them waste eir shells."

The breed had picked out the mud beeen two logs low down in the wall, to ake a peephole. One could see very tle in the intense darkness, but it was etter than being shut up within walls ithout a chance to look.

Disconcerted by the arrival of reinforceents, the redskins gave us a respite. alph took Mary into the millhouse, and ade her lie down on his bed. We reoved the gags from our prisoners and t them on boxes in the store. Gault ever opened his lips. In adversity the ader wore a look of haughty reserve that ecame him well. He exacted an unwillg admiration from me, the old devil! hkahkeek, on the other hand, groveled bjectly. To tell the truth, now that we ad our hostages we were in a quandary ow to use them. The difficulty was to ind a way of treating with drink-crazed avages armed with guns.

Pretty soon they came tearing back on orseback, yelling like all the devils reeased from hell. They tore across the lat in front of the store, and circling rode ack again, an ancient redskin trick to trike terror into our hearts and draw our ire. But we held it. They repeated the naneuver over and over. It was nerve-racking. Mary came stealing back into he store with a white face. No complaint scaped her, but she could not bear to be eft alone.

Later they returned on foot, and silently urrounding the house, let out a concerted ell close to the walls, and fired their uns. This was hard to bear. However, e set our jaws and let them yell themelves out. It was sickening to hear the ullets thud deep into the logs. One tore hrough the poles of the door, but did no urther damage.

The silence that succeeded was worse, or then we could not tell what they were p to. As it lengthened out our nerves tretched tighter and tighter. We had istributed ourselves around the walls, and ach man had made himself a chink to eep through. But, though we had put ut all lights inside, we could see nothing.

Ralph, like a good captain, circulated from one to another with words of cheer. But he came to me in the end saying gravely: "I can hear them working outside the blind wall of the millhouse. (This was the north side). I believe they are piling wood there. That means fire."

We kept this to ourselves as long as possible.

By and by, through the peepholes in the front of the store, we saw a weird procession. They were loping around the side hill out of range, each man carrying a lighted brand from the fire. Ominous fireflies! Their intention was now clear to all. Giving all the windows a wide berth, they came back on the north side. Joe Cardinal hastily scratched a chink here. He could have got one or two of them as they rode up, but Ralph held his hand.

"No good," he said grimly. "To kill a few of them won't help us any."

Presently we could hear the crackle of fire outside. Smoke seeped into the millhouse through the cracks between the heavy logs.

"They've set us afire," Ralph cried.

Gault did not change a hair.

Ahkahkeek slipped to the ground in an abject heap, moaning and crying.

"Let me out! Let me out!" he panted. "Those people 'fraid of me. I mak' them stop! I mak' them pull fire away. Oh, let me out, or all will burn!"

Ralph looked down at him with a contemptuous smile. I expect his toe itched to kick the creature.

"I know a better plan than that," he said. "Talk to them through the window. Tom, Joe, carry him to the window and unbar the shutter.

The Indian struggled feebly in their grasp.

"No!" he screeched. "No know me in the dark. Shoot me."

"Let them hear your voice," said Ralph.

The shutter was thrown back, and Ahkahkeek pressed up to the little opening, the others standing out of range. The Indian wildly shrieked the names of his men and burst into a crazy harangue.

"And now Gault at the other window," said Ralph with the same hard grin. "For twenty-five years they have regarded Gault as a sort of god. Let him show his power over them now."

Gault made no unmanly struggle.

"Unbind me and I'll walk to the window," he said coolly.

It was done. He unbarred the shutter himself. As he was about to fling it back, a thought struck him, and turning his head he said:

"If one of you will lend me a flashlight I'll show them who I am."

I handed mine over. With a truly magnificent display of bravado, Gault flung the shutter back, and, switching the light into his own face, stood there framed in the opening.

When Ahkahkeek's gabbling voice failed him at last for want of breath, Gault began to speak in cold and measured tones. Though they could not understand him, the sense of his words must have been plain enough.

"This is John Gault. You all know me. Have you gone mad, you fools? All the flour in the country is in this house. If you burn it, you starve. And if any harm comes to the people in this house, the police will come in and hang you to the last man. Put the fire out."

Ahkahkeek, taking a fresh breath, translated Gault's words, to the people outside. Still not a sound from them. It was maddening not to know how they were taking it. I ran back into the millhouse and put my ear against the north wall. I could hear them busying themselves on the other side. It sounded as if they were pulling the fire away, but I could not be sure. Then I heard an unmistakable hiss. Water! The pool was right at hand of course, and I suppose they were carrying it in their hats. I ran back into the store crying:

"We are saved!"

Ahkahkeek spoke to his men and then to us.

"Men say they sorry now. Say devil get inside their heads, not know what they doin'. Say they be good now."

"All right," said Ralph grimly. "But such children cannot be trusted with guns. They must give them to us."

And so it was done. For safety's sake our men were lined up armed inside the door. But there was no danger. The little, ragged, ill-favored men that crept in one at a time were merely pitiable now. They were only brave with whisky in them, yelling in company in the dark.

There were fifty-five guns in the party. Ahkahkeek had exact knowledge of them.

"That is all," he said at last, and we sighed in relief.

"Now we can sleep," breathed Ralph.

Mary ran to his arms.

XIII

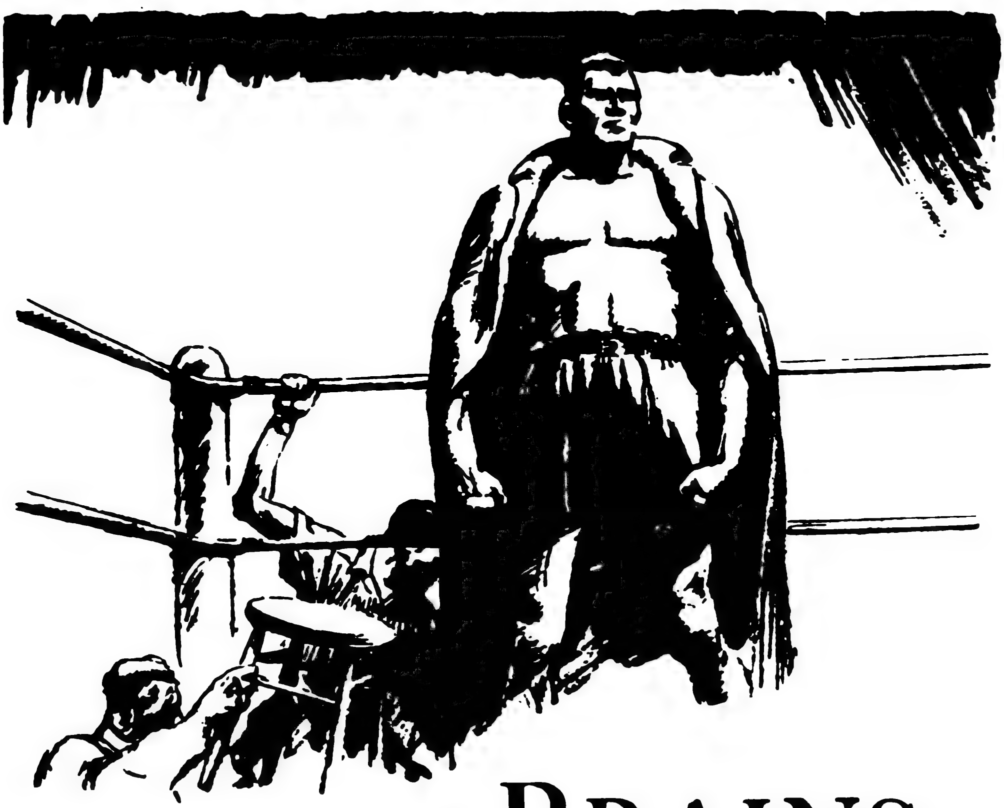
LITTLE more remains to be told. When we issued out in the morning light, it was a sick crowd of little braves that we routed out of the teepees. We returned their guns, and they left.

Mary Cranleigh stayed with us. We partitioned off a corner of the millhouse for her use. Her brother, poor, well-meaning, bemused little man, turned up later, and we took him in too.

Three days later Sergeant Anders came down the river in a Peterboro canoe with a native, and our troubles were over.

If my readers expect to hear that John Gault was publicly disgraced and punished, I must disappoint them; for nothing of the sort occurred. He still keeps up his state and amusing himself with his store, his steamboat, his electric light plant and the other wonders of Fort Good Hope—but in a somewhat less lordly fashion than heretofore. There are two stores there now. As soon as he realized he had lost, Gault started to make offers for our outfit, offers which increased daily until they reached the preposterous figure of fifty thousand dollars. Ralph was deaf to them. He sold out for a fraction of that sum to the great corporation which is known throughout the Northwest as the French Outfit. Thus he insured that his humble friends should not be again reduced to slavery.

In the middle of September we went up the river together on Gault's steamboat. Already the snow had been flying, and there was a film of ice in the mornings on the backwaters. We got out to town just before the big freeze. Ralph and Mary were married in Prince George, and I gave the starry bride away. The North country had got its grip on Ralph, and early in the spring he and Mary set off to trade at Fort McMaster on the Miwasa River. I had a stake in this outfit too, and I stipulated that they must locate a little nearer town, where I could visit them in the summers. They are the nearest thing to children of my own that I shall ever have.



Concerning BRAINS

And the Making of a Champion

By A. A. PROCTOR

YOU probably saw the Jock Casey-Jeff Briggs fight, or have read or have been told about it. For they tell about an affair of that kind a long, long time. Now I say, you take a fight like that. Stir up all the accounts of it you can find, written and oral. Add for spice a goodly dash of comment, gossip and inside dope. Let the thing simmer a few years—and now what have you? Why, a myth, of course. Not that myths are not fine, if you take them as myths and don't try to make them explain a lot of very likely unexplainable things for you. As did a clever young upstart of a sports reporter I met the other day. The subject of this particular fight came up, and in a little while he was informing me with all the assurance in the world that the reason Jeff Briggs—but then, you aren't interested in what he said, and it wasn't true, anyway.

The point I wish to make is that to explain a myth, it is necessary that you should have been there (to change my figure of speech) when the myth was launched into a believing world. As I was in this instance.

It started in Red Monahon's place—peephole inspection and admittance by card or recognition—one night along about half past eleven. I was reporting on the *News-Herald* at the time, and Jim Farrell was doing like service on the *Globe*. We had dropped in for a comradely schooner or two after having watched Jeff Briggs, the light-heavyweight titleholder, in one of his sensational quick-time knockouts. As I recall, we were both highly enthusiastic about it, and must have been discussing the champion in extravagant terms. At any rate, somebody at the next table suddenly projected himself into our conversation.

"You wise guys think that bum Briggs is quite the cats, don'cha?"

The words boomed, and had an inflection of infinite sarcasm. We looked up.

It was a tall, blond, sportily dressed young man. I had seen him come in some time before, and for the last half hour he had been toying with the same glass ot beer. I remember noticing how glum and disconsolate he looked. Only now he wasn't looking disconsolate any more. His jaw jutted menacingly, his lips curved at a scornful angle, an angle paralleled by a scowling brow.

As we stared at him in some surprise, he repeated his question, louder, glowering.

Here evidently was a man who did not care for Jeff Briggs, and from his manner, apparently he was not disposed to waste any affection on Jim and me, either. Glancing at the bulge of his shoulders and the girth of red neck that seemed to be testing the tensity of the striped silk collar he was wearing, and noting the great knuckle ridges of his oversize paws, I felt he was the sort of fellow you might be excused for going out of your way to be friends with.

Jim lighted a cigaret with a faraway look, as though he were utterly unaware of the interruption. I make it a rule to be politic in such situations, so I beamed on the frowning young man and drawled:

"Oh, I wouldn't go so far as to say that. He's pretty fair, I guess?"

You see, my tone of voice half made it a question.

"Huh! You guess! Whadda *you* know about it?" he glared from me to Jim and back again. "You guess! Now let me tell you somethin', fella. That guy Briggs is a tinhorn—a flop—a fake. Get me? He can't fight—never could an' never will."

He sideswept his open hand in a gesture of finality.

"Is that so?" I tried to seem properly impressed, like one who has just heard the voice of authority. "Come on over and have a beer with us, won't you?"

"Sure," chirped Jim, "come on over and have a drink with us."

The red-faced, blond young man softened. You could see the sneer slide off his face and he became nearly human again. He champed down on his cigar, dredged himself out of his chair and came over. He was a husky specimen.

Jim pushed out a seat for him at the table.

"Thanks. No beer for me. I'll sit down a minute, though." Then with a shy grin that did wonders for his face: "Waitin' for my sweetie. Be around any time now." He became serious once more. "About this guy Briggs now, fellas—take it from me, he ain't nothin' but a big cheese. Why, he don't take on anybody 'cept set-ups! Nobody 'cept set-ups, I tell ya. Picks 'em easy an' knocks 'em easy. Half of 'em so weak they'd drop by theirselfs if you walked past 'em. Tell me: who'd he ever K. O. was any good? Name me one. Jes' go ahead an' name me one! See, ya can't, can ya? That's what I thought." (He did not pause to allow us to offer a candidate for honors, even if we had cared to, which we didn't.) "Where do they get that stuff—he can fight? Pooh!"

He spat disgustedly. Then he carefully lifted his fancy straw hat from his head, as if fearful of ruffling the pomaded perfection of his hair. At the moment I was thinking that he looked like a collar ad man with a fit of temper, if you can imagine such a paradox. He extracted a lavender bordered silk handkerchief from his pocket and swabbed the sweatband, meanwhile boring Jim and myself with searching eyes, as if trying to determine whether we put any stock in his words.

WE DID not offer to prompt him. It was a safe bet that he had something on his mind, and would be the better for airing it in his own good time. Suddenly he paused in his swabbing, pushed his face within two inches of my own, and continued:

"You boys look to me like gents, an' I'm gonna tell you somethin'."

"We're newspaper men," amended Jim.

"Aw, that's awright, that's awright," he excused our failing magnanimously. "I guess you don't know who I am, do you?"

We pleaded gross ignorance.

"Well, I'm Flash O'Donnell from Memphis. Ever hear of Flash O'Donnell? No? Well, that's me, Flash O'Donnell from Memphis."

"Glad to know you, Mr. O'Donnell," said I, fighting back the treacherous urge to add "from Memphis."

" 'S awright," said the blond young man. "Now down Memphis way they call me 'the Flash'—I'm fast as a streak, see?

I'm good, I am, get me? Oh, I ain't fightin' now, but that don't make no diff'rence. Get this under your lid. I can lick any guy my weight in the worl' an' I don't mean maybe neither! Listen what I'm tellin' ya, fellas, that guy Briggs smells. Why, I've whipped Briggs. Sure I did. Twice! I licked him twice, I did. Now what do ya think of that, huh? How do you like them apples?"

"You say you've licked Jeff Briggs, Mr. O'Donnell?" said Jim, as sober as a judge.

"You heard me! I licked him. K. O.'d him. Wiped the floor with 'im! You guys think I'm talkin' through my hat, don't you? Here, take a squint at this then."

He bent his head and with both hands began to furrow into the lustrous smoothness of the top of his skull.

"Look. Feel it? Kin you see that scar, hey? Took five stitches to close that. Ya see it, don'tcha?"

We saw it and said so.

"Well, that's a souvenir I got the first time I fight Jeff Briggs," the red-faced young man continued, patting the disturbed strands in place with deft touches. "Sure, I fought him in Nashville—that's his home town—three years ago. He wasn't no champ then, he wasn't. I fought 'im right in his own districk—his mob all thought he was the snake's garters. He took me on 'cause he figured I was a big ham, see? Well, I showed him.

"We signed up for a ten round go, an' I could see right off the bat he had the house with 'im—an' a tough section that is, what I mean! So, along about the third round I see I got him goin'. Yessir, I knew I had his number, an' he was beginnin' to go out like a candle. Well, just before we come up for the fourth, I kin see his manager an' the ref'ree an' his seconds in Briggs' corner bunched up an' chewin' the rag, an' I kinda thought somethin' phoney was gonna be pulled off. So I says to myself, says I, 'Keep yer eyes open, kid, they's somethin' phoney comin' off in a minute if ya don't watch out.' Then Steve Scutz—Steve was doin' my managin' for me then—Steve says, 'Git in there now an' finish that guy. Give 'im the works.' So I went in there and got him goin' again and pretty soon I slip him the ole one-two and he plunked down like a hunka butter. He gits up and comes for me and biff! I let him have it right on the button and he gets ready to take a high dive. And then, what the hell do ya know, the damn lights go out and I hear somebody holler fire. And the next thing I know somethin' comes down on my bean and I see about a million stars. Then I passes out cold.

"Well, next thing I know, I wake up and we're ridin' to the station in a taxi, me and Steve. I got a towel full o' blood round my head and I kin hardly open my eyes I got such a headache. I says to Slim, 'What hit me? Did I win?' and he says somebody musta landed off my knob with a blackjack or somethin' and tells me I lost the fight by a K. O.

"'What the hell d'ya mean?' I says, 'I *knocked* that guy!'

"'Sure,' says Steve, 'only somebody pulled Briggs up on his pins when the lights went out and that little guy, his manager, had a flashlight lit so the referee could see to count you out by.'

"So I says to Steve, 'What the hell kinda manager are you anyways, lettin' 'em get away with that? What the hell good are ya? Why didn't you tell them guys where they got off at, huh?'

"'Now how in hell could I?' says Steve. 'They was a big bruiser sittin' next to me stuck a gun in my ribs and tole me to take it easy, and when the ref was through the count, he says, "Take that hunka Limburger back to Memphis where they can't smell him an' make it snappy, or this trigger might go off by accident."'

"So that's how we come to be in the taxi. And that's how I got me this souvenir—took five stitches, it did. Yessir, them rats fixed that fight, awright, awright. Well, the next mornin' I see the papers an' it says—it says—wait a minute, I think I got some o' them clippin's on me."

Mr. O'Donnell pulled an enormous pigskin wallet from his inside pocket, and from a flap took out a wad of worn and discolored bits of newspaper. He pryed them apart, squinting, and at length held forth a scrap whose print was almost illegible.

"Here, you kin see they had the newspapers buffaloed too."

The clipping read:

ANOTHER K. O. FOR JEFF BRIGGS

Last night at the Gashouse A. C. Jeff Briggs stopped Memphis Flash O'Donnell in

the fourth round of a scheduled ten round bout. The Memphis lad seemed to be having things his own way till he ran into Briggs' educated right. Due to the failure of the lighting system, decision had to be rendered by flashlight.

"God, that was a dirty trick," said Jim with feeling, as he handed back the clipping. "Didn't you try to do anything about it?" I could see from Jim's face that this pug had made a friend.

"Naw, what's the use?" said O'Donnell. "But wait, I ain't finished yet. Well, I promised myself I'd square that guy if it was the last thing I ever done. So one night—about a year later, it was—I was takin' the air on the Parkway all by myself and who do I see comin' up the line but this little feller walkin' with a guy about my size. I knew the little fella soon's I lamped 'im—Briggs' manager—and when they come up close under a street light I see here's the rat I been layin' for.

"So I walks up to 'em with my hands in my pockets and I says sarcastic, 'Hello, friends. Know me, do ya?' I could see the little guy wasn't wise, being as how I was all dolled up in my street clothes, but I knew Briggs reco'nized me right off the reel. He jes' stands there lookin' at me, and I says, 'Remember the Memphis Flash, Mr. Briggs?'

"'Don't know you,' he says. 'Come on, Mac,' he says to his manager, and they begin walkin' away.

"'One minute, Mr. Briggs,' says I, grabbin' his coat, 'are ya positive we ain't met before? Looks to me like your memory's bad.'

"'What the hell do you want?' says Briggs, quiet-like. I was watchin' his fists and I see them close and his shoulder raise, like I was waitin' for. So he lets drive with his right—and when he did that, what did I do but step in and knock him for a row of ice-houses! I swear to Gawd I only hit him twice, but I think the first punch was enough. The little guy sees Briggs drop and he stands there shiverin' and hollerin' 'Police! Police!', so I push him in the face and hopped over a fence, and shot up an alley. So I got home all right."

Mr. O'Donnell paused to clear his throat.

"Well, fellas, that's the lowdown on Jeff Briggs for ya. The next guy comes around bellyachin' about how good Briggs is, you tell him for me he's a liar that don't know his ear from his elbow, get me? And tell him Flash O'Donnell can lick Briggs any day in the week and glad to do it for nothin'—any time and anywhere!"

THE Memphis Flash perched his straw hat on the back of his head. His animated narrative had heightened the natural glow of his face to a deep tomato red.

"Why don't you have a drink with us, Mr. O'Donnell? You might as well while you're waiting," said Jim. And he motioned a waiter.

"Aw, awright," agreed the Flash. "I'll go ya jes' one. I wonder what the hell is keepin' that skirt o' mine. You make a date fer eleven and ya get there by half past and then maybe if ya're lucky they show up on you around twelve or so. The janes is funny that way—never on time. How do they get that way is what I say. Peggy's a nice kid, though. Trouble is, she's gettin' too ritzy lately—been puttin' on too much dog since she got that job as model with one o' them high-tone dress joints—you know, with a frog monicker. Lotta swell dames go there, see? Class. Well, my own customers ain't so bad, neither. I do business with some o' the best people in the city. But Peg is gettin' a lot o' highfalutin' ideas into her bean. Wants me to throw up my business, can you tie that? Says she's ashamed and afraid.

"Now I ask you, what is there to be ashamed about? I only handle the best stuff—none o' your wood alcohol for mine! Here I come all the way to New York 'cause I ain't makin' no jack fightin' and a friend wants to set me up in business, and when I begin makin' a little money my girl wants me to throw it up. Ain't that a hell of a note? That's a woman for ya.

"So I says to her, 'What'll I do then if I give it up—I never learned nothin' but fight.'

"'All right, then,' says she, 'why don't you fight? Anythin' is better'n what you're doin' now!'

"'What the hell,' I tell her, 'you know I can't make no money fightin'.'

"'Some does,' says she, 'but I don't

care what you do—drive a truck, sell neckties—anythin', so long's you give up what you're doin'.' Sell neckties! Can ya see *me* sellin' neckties? Crack a smile at that one, will ya!

"'Come on, Peg,' I keep tellin' her, 'Come on, let's get hitched. I'm makin' good money. Maybe in a year or so we kin get us a li'l apartment on the Drive with a coon with a uniform that opens the door for you goin' in an' out.' But she cries, 'No, no!' I gotta come clean, gotta throw up my business and leave my friend flat. Now is that the way for a fella to act, I ask you?"

Here the Flash shook his head sadly.

The waiter slouched up and skidded the three beers in front of us so that a blob of froth hopped out of each glass and spattered the table. Jim alone did not take up his glass. His forefingers hooked in his vest pockets, he studied O'Donnell minutely and dreamily dragged at the limp cigaret drooping from his mouth.

"Tell me, Flash," spoke up Jim suddenly, becoming intimate, "how long since you dropped the fight game?"

"Oh, eight-nine months."

"Uh-huh." Pause, then, "In pretty fair shape still?"

"You said it. Take good care o' myself. Smoke maybe a cigar a day an' lay off the hard stuff. Oh, I'm in good shape."

"Uh-huh." A longer pause. "Say, Flash, if you could get another crack at Jeff Briggs, would you take it? I mean if somebody came up to you and offered you a championship bout, huh?"

The two of them looked at each other in the eye for a full minute, Jim questioning, the Flash puzzled. Then the Flash laughed.

"I tole ya," he said, "I take that bum on for nothin'—and that goes, buddy!"

"Let's see," said Jim. "You say you boxed him three years ago—that so? Well, Briggs is a damn' sight better man now than he was then—maybe three or four hundred per cent better. Do you think you could take him now?"

The Flash's jaws clamped and the little knobs of muscle at their angles twitched. His lustreless blue eyes lighted up.

"What the hell, fella, what the hell! I said I can lick that guy and I don't care if it's two years or ten years. I said I can lick him, see—lick him, knock him on his ear, put him to sleep. What'sa matter with you, don'tcha understand United States? I tole you I was *good*, didn't I? Well, then!"

He let that sink in; then more softly:

"Why, all was the matter with me was I never had no good managers; had three and the next one was worse than the one before. None of 'em had any brains, no brains at all. Now what t'hell good is a manager to ya without brains, huh?"

"No good," was Jim's solemn estimate.

"That's right, no good," agreed the Flash.

"What I want to know," said Jim, "is whether you'd be willing to throw up your job as your lady friend wants you to, and go into training for a shot at this man Briggs?"

"Aw, don't worry, fella," laughed the Flash, using his very expressive hands to make the point, "Briggs ain't gonna fight *me*. You couldn't get that guy into the same ring with me with a coupla steam shovels, take it from baby!"

"But if I could?"

"Could what?"

"Get Briggs into the same ring with you—put you in a position, if you won, where you could make more money in one night than you probably do now in three years?"

"Say, bo—are you trying to give me a good time?"

"Of course not. I mean every word I say."

"Listen here, are you tryin' to tell me maybe you kin fix me up a fight—that you want to tie up as my manager?"

"Uh-huh. I had both those ideas in mind, yes."

The Flash scrutinized Jim's face as a bank president might that of a prospective office boy.

"You look like you got some brains in that bean," he said at length, and I found it hard not to smile at his hard-boiled sincerity.

"Thank you," said Jim.

"I'll tell ya, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Farrell—Jim Farrell," supplied Jim.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Farrell, I'll tell you, Jim—if you think you can swing this shebang, why then I'm on—on with both feet, yes siree. I'll start trainin' any day you say."

"Well, that's fine," said Jim, "fine!

Where can I get in touch with you, Flash?"

The Flash handed Jim an elaborately embossed card and said pompously:

"Call me any time before eleven. And say, that reminds me. I guess I better put in a call. Maybe that broad o' mine is dead or somethin'. Well, over the river, gents. Glad to meetcha."

We watched him stalk off with that bent-kneed stride so characteristic of athletes who have done much work on their toes. Then I turned to Jim with a grin.

"Well, that's a story for the Sunday magazine section. Shall we toss a coin to see who gets it?"

"The hell it is! This is one story that isn't going to get written—not at least till we've seen how the end comes out. After that, it's all right with me what you write. In fact, I'll relinquish all rights to the yarn to you."

"See how the end comes out—what are you talking about?"

"Just what I said. Didn't you hear what we were discussing a minute ago?"

"What do you mean? Do you mean to tell me you were serious when you were egging that dumb pug for his sob story—all that bunk about getting him a championship bout and all that?"

"You bet I was serious."

"Aw, come off. What do you take me for?"

"Damn it, I tell you I mean it. Listen: I'm going to look into this boy's record a bit, watch him in action and get a slant on him. Then if he looks as good as he thinks he is, I'll lend him my brains—uh—make a complete man of him. You heard what he said—he needed brains. Anyway, it looks to me like a nice problem in psychology. It would be great stuff seeing it work, even if it falls flat. He has licked Briggs—and I see no reason for not believing his account of the fight. He knows he can whip him now, and he'd like nothing in the world better than to do it gratis. Then there's the added incentive of that wench of his. All in all, I think it will make a darn interesting experiment. And who knows—maybe a very remunerative one, too?"

"But my God, Jim! What do *you* know about it? How are you going to get him this impossible match? Don't be a fool."

"I haven't an idea right at this minute, of course, old top. But everything in its own good time. If he makes good, I promise you I'll get Briggs' Hancock, don't worry."

"I'll say one thing for you—you have confidence in yourself. But then, the Flash will probably prove to be nothing but a prime prune," I predicted cynically.

"Well," said Jim, "I shouldn't pray for it if I were you. Because, after all, it might spoil that story you're going to write."

I DID not see Jim for some three weeks after that night. Then one afternoon he rang me up at the office. From the enthusiasm of his voice I feared the worst, and in a minute or two, my fears were verified. Much as I had tried to dissuade him, he'd succumbed to that silly idea of his.

First off, he told me he had thrown up his job and was now the manager of the next light-heavyweight champion; he said that the Flash and he were boarding at a farm house near East Orange, that they had rigged out a barn for training quarters and had hired a couple of sparring partners. For the time being, Jim said, he was going to handle the training end himself.

Now I knew Jim had a couple of thousand or so salted away which he was planning to spend on a trip to Europe, and I felt sorry for the boy, because it was quite probable he'd go through the money pronto in this absurd scheme of his, and what would he have to show for it?

So I called him an incompetent, a moron and many other things uncomplimentary. But he took it all in good spirit. He said that in a month the Flash would be fit to take on a few bouts and thereby earn a little while getting into his pace. He said the Flash looked good, very good. In short, Jim talked with all the assurance and extravagance of a man who'd been in the game for a decade or two. And my cold jibes of incredulity and derision simply did not get to him. I remember asking him why it hadn't occurred to him to use one of the many gymnasiums in the city that boxers use for training—that it would have saved expenses, been more convenient and so forth. And he answered gravely that oh yes, he'd thought of that, but that it wouldn't do for his purposes.

Finally, he said he'd send along some

tickets for one of the fights he was going to sign the Flash up for—he'd send them to give me a chance to swallow my words. As we said good-by and I hung up, I was thinking how you couldn't tell even about your closest friends—one moment they appear perfectly sane and the next you see them become hopeless victims of delusions of grandeur—imbeciles.

"Poor Jim," I said. "Poor boob!"

The details of the affair at which I first witnessed the Flash in action are now somewhat hazy in my mind. It was some months after the telephone call, and the reason I was not invited to see the Flash sooner was, I learned, because, though he had fought several times in the interim, none of the bouts had been in the city. Two in Newark, one in Hoboken, one in Philadelphia and one in Binghamton—Jim smiled quizzically as he told them off, and somehow I felt he was not smiling because he thought the names funny.

The bout was taking place at the Pioneer Club. Jim confided to me that he had planned not to show the Flash in the city at all, but had signed him on at a minute's notice for the semi-final to a lightweight elimination contest. It flashed through my mind, then, that only yesterday I had read somewhere that Jeff Briggs had left for the Coast—Hollywood, to be exact. Which might or might not have some significance.

At ringside Jim introduced me to Flash O'Donnell's lady friend. I can describe her most concisely in ring terminology. She was a knockout! She was a scintillating blonde with wide blue eyes; her nose was retroussé and pert and her lips fine and curving, with just enough camouflage, expertly applied, to heighten the pale coral of her complexion. And as for her figure—why, I find myself without words. She wore clothes as only mannequins can wear them. I have been told by one who ought to know that to find the most beautiful women, seek among the world's mannequins. Seeing Peggy Carlin, her marcelled bobbed hair set off by a trig little black chapeau with just an arrow of silver for ornament, and her slim figure moulded by the smooth lines of her ensemble costume—man, I could well believe it.

I repeat, she was a knockout. I felt that with a girl like that cheering for me, it would be a comparatively simple thing to climb into a ring and topple a world's champion.

As I have said, I do not remember much about the fight other than that the Flash—he was introduced as "Toledo Jock Casey"—looked very presentable in action; that he won in the fourth round; and that there were stars in Peggy Carlin's eyes when the referee raised Flash O'Donnell's right mitt.

And I left the fight feeling that if the Memphis Flash were worth the salt in a cafeteria bowl of soup, he ought to be entirely capable of doing what he said he could do—lick Briggs anywhere, any time, any place. Only that he ought to have extended the boast to include anybody.

IN THE weeks that followed I often found myself wondering about this stunt of Jim Farrell's, although, indeed, it had exceeded the proportions of a stunt long ago. The Flash and his girl were deadly serious about the thing, and Jim no less. How Jim was going to arrange that match with Briggs, I'm sure neither the Flash nor Peggy had the ghost of an idea, but they seemed as sanguine as if the whole thing had already been settled.

To me it seemed the fight wouldn't come off except by a miracle. On what grounds could Jim seek a championship bout? "Toledo Jock Casey" had by this time a half dozen or so victories over third and fourth raters—and that was all. Was that anything to base claims for such a bout on? He'd probably be laughed out of the office by every promoter he'd visit.

Perhaps if Jim added to this brief record the list of wins of the Memphis Flash, the whole would assume impressiveness enough to warrant a bout with some of the contenders, at least. But then that would entail disclosing the identity of the Flash—and even a blind man could see that keeping his identity under cover was an intrinsic part of Jim's plan, whatever it was. Yes, I was sure Jim had overreached himself, and I felt vaguely sorry for the Flash and Peggy Carlin.

Hence the welcome jolt I received on meeting Jim on lower Broadway one hot afternoon about two o'clock. Jim was hurrying along at such a pace that I had to seize his arm to make him see me even.

"What's the matter," I said, "getting so high-hat you're forgetting your friends?"

"Sorry, sorry, old top," he grinned, panting a little. "Didn't see you. Got about twenty-five minutes to get a bite to eat. Important conference. Lunched? C'mon, let's drop in here somewhere—talk while we eat. I've got news."

We dropped into one of the kosher places that caters to the needle trades in that section, and while a frowsy looking waitress with a bright magenta mouth toddled off on crooked stilt heels to bring us some sandwiches and coffee, Jim told me what was up.

"Well, I've done it," he said, beaming.

"Done what?"

"Why, got the Flash that bout with Briggs."

"The hell you say!"

"Sure thing. Ted Richardson just received signatures from Briggs and his manager—sent on from the Coast, you know—and I close the deal with Ted today. The Flash got a friend of his to go the five grand forfeit, so we're all set."

"But how did you do it, man?"

"Oh, easy enough. You see, I didn't ask for a championship bout—so I got it."

"You're talking in riddles. What do you mean you didn't ask for a championship bout? Then what good——"

"It's for the title all right, bank on that—only Jeff Briggs and his manager don't know it."

"Don't know it! Gosh, you got me all balled up. What do you mean, don't know it?"

"Wait a minute—here come our sandwiches. Gee, I'm famished. Well, you been reading the papers lately, haven't you?" he said, his eyes twinkling and his teeth sinking into the thick slabs of black bread. "Then you know that Briggs has signed to meet Tommy Roberts next September—big open-air affair and all that—Tommy being considered as you know the most logical of the logicals. Briggs has been broadcasting that he wanted to put one or two fights under his belt before this go. You know, just for the practice—and to stiffen his bank account a little, maybe.

"Well, he had one of those fights on the Coast the other day. Polished off some ham in thirty-five seconds or so, and had all the yokels gaping at his prowess.

"About his other preparation fight, he said he'd take it on when he gets back to the city. Sparks, his manager, left the details of selecting a proper practice horse to Richardson, who has been promoting all of Briggs' fights since he won the title. Now, here's where we come in:

"This friend of the Flash's knows Ted Richardson—a buddy of his. This friend of the Flash's—his ex-boss, I forgot to say, is a prominent man about town—knows about everybody you'd want to know to make life reasonably tolerable. Well, he and I went to Richardson and told him we had just the man for that fight. We gave him a lot of dope, some of it quite true. Said Toledo Jock—what are you laughing at?—said Toledo Jock had been fighting around the Middle West for a couple of years. I showed him the clippings about his recent fights. You know, don't you, that the Flash K. O.'d Marty Marelli the other night in two? Considered good, Marelli—well, fairly good.

"We played it up to Richardson till he came to believe that the Flash would be a good bet—that he'd probably stay around long enough with Briggs to make the bout interesting with the fans. Not too long, but enough to give Briggs a chance to dazzle the grandstand, you understand. Yes sir, before we got through talking with Richardson he was convinced Toledo Jock was Briggs' favorite meat. And he thinks that on the strength of the Marelli knockout, he can play the fight up enough to make it practicable to stage it in the Garden. Not bad, do you think?

"So," Jim concluded with a gulp of coffee, "there you are. But I've got to beat it. Hop a taxi, I think. Going down my way? Well then, you'll hear from me before long," he said with a parting grin. "Don't have to tell you to keep all this under your hat—under penalty of death. I'll see you anon."

AS THE fight drew near, the papers gave it more and more publicity. For the sports writers it seemed to hold interest only in so far as it would give them opportunity to get a line on the champion. Most of them voiced the hope that this unknown, Toledo Jock Casey, would stand up long enough for them to judge Briggs' condition in view of his coming bout with Tommy Roberts. One or two suggested that the fight public de-served more consideration than it was getting, that in all fairness Briggs should have chosen an opponent of more proven fiber than Casey.

On the morning of the fight I received a call from Jim, asking me whether I could meet him at the Garden that afternoon at three. Weighing in, he said. Might prove interesting to me. I said I would be there, and at the time specified I arrived and a boy directed me to the dressing room of Toledo Jock Casey.

Jim cheerfully greeted me at the door. I glanced toward the far end of the room, and near some lockers I saw the Flash. He was bent over, his back toward me, stripping off his athletic shirt. Near by, talking to him very quietly, stood an aldermanic looking individual with a paunch, a pose, a dog-leash watch chain and the biggest elk tooth attached I've ever seen. He wore diamonds on his fingers.

Jim closed the door and called:

"Hey, there, Jock!"

Jock turned around, and I stood rooted in surprise. With amazement I looked toward the figure, nude as Pan, advancing, his shirt dangling from one huge hand; then I looked back at Jim. Surely it was the Flash—but was it? He walked like the Flash, faintly suggested the Flash—but Lord! Blond hair, the Flash had; this chap had a mop of dizzy red. The Flash's face was pink and clear. This fellow had more freckles than complexion. Bright, rusty, healthy freckles, singly and in colonies, over every square inch of face, neck and arms. And instead of the Flash's almost colorless brows, this man peered from beneath flaring red ones that overshadowed his eyes like twin cliffs!

"Meet Toledo Jock," said Jim, immensely enjoying my surprise, "he's going down to meet Jeff Briggs in a minute or so. I don't believe the champ will remember having met him, do you?"

"I should say not," I said earnestly. "So this is how you're going to work it!"

"This is how, yes," laughed Jim. "How does it look to you—the disguise, I mean?"

"Gee, the man who did that job must be a genius. I wouldn't have known him, I swear, if I'd met him anywhere but here. Who did it?"

"Oh, Cliff Sheldon, the best little handler of make-up on Broadway," said a remarkably mellow voice at my side—the aldermanic gentleman's. I made his acquaintance, and shortly afterward we went down to the office. But Jim was wrong. Briggs had not arrived. Sparks, his manager, was there, and Richardson, and one or two others besides some newspaper photographers. Briggs was detained, Sparks let it be known, and would show up later in the afternoon.

If little Sparks had an inkling that he had ever set eyes on the freckled faced, bush browed redhead, his manner did not show it. The Flash stood around slouching, a vapid look on his face; and Sparks, from his air of condescension, very likely cherished the thought that Toledo Jock Casey's sole lien on pugilistic fame would be his having been knocked out at the hands of Jeff Briggs.

We returned to the dressing room, and I said:

"What's the matter with Briggs? Isn't he even interested enough in his opponent tonight to come around to look him over?"

"Aw, that's his funeral," put in the sweet voiced man with the paunch and watch chain. "He'll be seeing more than his opponent this evening."

"That's right," Jim asserted, "and you can bet your hat Briggs won't be the only bird in this town getting over the shock this time tomorrow. The sports writers, for instance."

"And," said the Flash, "kiddo, if you wanta get away with murder, jes' listen to papa: Run home and get all the shekels you got hid away in your mattress and put it all on Toledo Jock tonight. Maybe it'll be the last easy money you'll ever make, and I don't mean maybe."

YOU know the Garden on fight night. The mass of faces like pale yellow stippling on a background of black, relieved here and there by a brilliant daub of color of feminine raiment; the drone of thousands of variously pitched voices, the peculiar odor of crowded humanity combined with fetor of stagnant tobacco smoke and the tangy smell of liniment; the twilight monochrome of the vast arena, and the powerful lights like massed suns above the ring, shedding a dazzling, vibrating glow upon it; the frail looking ring itself, with its white rubberized ropes, perched raftlike amid the shifting sea of people.

And thus it was the night of this fight.

I was sitting at ringside, close to the Flash's corner. Not five feet away was the press box. Directly behind me a microphone was rigged up to broadcast the fight to millions of home fans. On one side of me sat the Flash's gold mine—the aldermanic gentleman with the several attributes. And on the other side was Peggy Carlin, looking more gorgeous, if that were possible, than on that other occasion. She was flushed with excitement.

"Have you seen Flash?" she whispered.

I nodded, smiling.

"Doesn't he look *terrible!* Honest, he scared the life out of me when I saw him. I didn't recognize him. And if I didn't I'm sure Briggs won't, will he?"

I said I was sure Briggs wouldn't. Then she said:

"Jim Farrell is an awf'lly smart fellow to have planned all this, don't you think? He told us he went to Harvard and everything. Flash says Jim's got more brains than any man he knows. He is awf'lly smart, isn't he?"

I nodded solemnly.

"Lots of brains. Tell me, Peggy, do you think Flash'll win?"

"Why, how ridiculous! Of course. Didn't he say he would? Why, of course he will."

We had not taken our seats till toward the end of the semi-final, and at length this was over and the ring cleared. The warning gong began to clang its melancholy dirge, and the interval was taken over for the introduction to the public of sundry prospective champions, the announcer's voice blurting from his megaphone like a battery of fog-horns. These introductions over, he resumed the business in hand, and the great arena boomed with the reverberations of his stertorous tones:

"Lay-dee-ees an' gentlemen! The main ee-eevent of the ee-eevenin'. We have with us Tolee-eedo Jock Cay-see-ee, winner over Mar-tee Mar-tell-ee an' man-ee-ee others, versus Jeff Briggs, light-heavyweight champeen of the wor-r-rld. Twel-luve r-r-round bout — no-o-o dee-cision to be given. Weights: Tol-ee-ee-do Jock Cay-see, wan hunder-rd sevuntee-ee-two pounds an' three-ee quar-rters; Jeff Briggs, wan hunder-rd seventee-four pounds——"

The gong clanged on, and looking up, I saw the Flash coming down the aisle, closely followed by Jim in his shirt sleeves, some towels on his arm. Two others brought up the rear, burdened with water bucket, bottles, sponges and other items of rest period toilet. As the Flash came by he grinned and gave my arm a quick squeeze, bent over, and almost without breaking his stride, kissed Peggy; then with a wave of the hand was off. He was wearing a dull green robe which seemed to me to be inside out, and on the back was a faint impression of a zigzag of yellow lightning.

I asked Peggy whether she liked to watch fights. She said sure, as long as the Flash was not taking a beating, and she was certain that he never would.

"After all, boxing is no more dangerous than riding a cab among the Sixth Avenue Elevated pillars, is it?" she smiled.

As we were bantering, Briggs climbed into the ring. His scarlet robe made a vivid splotch of color in the light that flooded from above. It seemed to me he looked very bored, even while the packed thousands paid him a tremendous tribute. He sat down, and I saw his eye stray over to the Flash's corner. What he saw did not seem to impress him tremendously, for he turned his head and with a listless nonchalance chatted with little Sparks and his trainer.

Bing-bong-clang!

The two boxers came to the center of the ring: Briggs, dark, chunky, electric, wearing scarlet trunks with a tiny white cross on the left leg; the Flash, lumbering and awkward looking, like an adolescent yokel.

All about me I heard snickering comments:

"My Gawd, he *looks* like a twenty-to-one shot, all right!"

"Gosh, where'd the bozo get the hair?"

"He reminds you a lot of Ruby Bob Fitzsimmons, don't he—so disgustingly different!"

"Won't last a cockeyed round—listed what I say."

"I got money says he stays two. Jeff always drags 'em round a couple."

The bell, and Round One . . .

THE less said about that round the better. Suffice it to say Briggs gave the Flash a boxing lesson, with all the trimmings. His left jab was something pleasing to watch, perfect in timing and deadly in its placing. He seemed to land it at will, and once I counted six rapid-fire jabs delivered successively to the Flash's chin, and without a return.

Briggs danced about blithely, shooting his punches in from all angles, beating the Flash to almost every blow, sharpshooting from long range and pummeling him in the infighting. In short, the Flash was totally outclassed, seemed bewildered and ill at ease. As the blithe radio announcer behind me told the home spectators:

"Casey's stomach's beginnin' to look like it had a case of measles . . . Haven't seen him land a solid punch this round . . . Looks like all Casey is got is his hair . . . It's red, radio fans, red, fighting red, but Casey isn't doing much fighting . . . All Briggs!"

And that's about all the Flash did seem to have. His hair, yes, and his name.

Round Two came and went, and all the Flash succeeded in doing was to avoid some of Briggs' bombardment. But not all, by any means. It was quite patent that Briggs was not pressing matters. He knew he had his man in the hollow of his hand, could drop him any time he cared to. Why extend himself?

Round Three was more of the same. The bout was growing deadly dull. Catcalls, jeers and howls from the crowd. "Make 'em fight." "Throw 'em out." "Hey you redhead, wake up!" "Get goin' in there!"

We three hopeful conspirators were not having a pleasant time of it there at ringside. As for myself, I got a bit of doubtful consolation just before the bell. Briggs cut loose and lashed two stiff rights that seemed to carry all the power of his solid body behind them to the Flash's head. The blows landed with the reports of pistol shots and jarred his head back, but that was all. The Flash did not look hurt; instead he grinned. And I thought, just as the bell struck, I could see surprise written on Briggs' countenance.

The first minute and a half of the fourth round nothing happened, and the crowd was yelling for blood. Twice the referee warned the Flash to get in there and fight. I feared the fight would be called. Peggy was taking the thing like a good sport. Every time the Flash took a hard one she clenched her fingers till they showed white at the knuckles, and shifted in sympathetic little jerks in her seat. Watching her, I could almost forgive the Flash a little for his wretched performance.

And then the fight took on its first bit of color. A long, sweeping overhead blow half tore the red wig from the Flash's head. It hung over his ear, exposing a head that had been shaved to the bone. The crowd laughed merrily. If they couldn't have their fight, they'd have their joke. A bald-headed pug with a wig—that was a good one! And as they roared, Briggs ran into a leaping jab that almost flattened his nose. It made him furious. His lips a-snarl, his eyes blazing, he hurled himself at the Flash, cornering him, crowding him to the ropes. A terrific right cross set the Flash back on his heels, blinking. He caromed off the ropes, his back seared by two great welts. Briggs rushed him again, and the ropes whined with the impact. A bright trickle made a crooked red line down the Flash's chin. He closed in on Briggs, clamped his arms about him, while Briggs drummed short trip-hammer blows to his midriff. Dazedly hanging on, the Flash inclined his head and spat over the ropes a red mouthful that richly spattered on the typesheets of one of the sports reporters.

And then, without knowing how it came about, I saw the Flash sitting on the canvas, his face working in spasms. Gloved hands pressed desperately to his groin, he was writhing from side to side in pain. Suddenly he lifted one arm and motioned weakly toward Briggs, who stood over him glowering.

The crowd booed and hissed. They had seen this sort of thing before. Casey was faking. The referee thought so, too. He disregarded the Flash's agonized gestures that he had been fouled, and began the count. But the bell cut him short.

Peggy was gently weeping now. The aldermanic gentleman chewed ferociously on a dead cigar stub. I watched what was going on in the Flash's corner. I saw Jim pry loose the wig—it had evidently been glued on to the Flash's skull. One of the seconds was swabbing the Flash's face, neck and arms with a pungent liquid from a bottle. The Flash sprawled back, supporting himself by his arms on the ropes, his chest pounding and his head slowly rolling from side to side.

A steady stream of words were coming from Jim's mouth as he fanned the Flash with the towel. They were directly above us, and though I couldn't catch what Jim was saying because of the noise and because Jim was talking low, I could see that the words were having some effect. The Flash stopped the motion of his head, opened his eyes and made an effort at a grin. I could see it took a lot of nerve to do it, and resulted more in something like a grimace of pain than in a look of hilarity. The Flash took several whiffs at the ammonia, shook his head to clear it; then raised his glove to his mouth and shouted something into Jim's ear. Jim nodded vigorously, his face breaking into his first smile of the evening. He slapped the Flash heartily on the back just as the bell sounded.

THE man who came out of his corner to face Briggs that fifth round was not the same man who had, through every minute of the preceding rounds, been taking as precise and finished a drubbing as any master of the art ever administered to a third-rater. True, with his shaven head gleaming like old marble in sunlight, the Flash looked strangely dissimilar to the gangling redhead of the round before; it made him look sharper, sturdier, more formidable. But it was not so much this change in appearance that struck the crowd as remarkable, though as the Flash stepped out at the tap of the bell he was greeted with jeers, heckling and laughter; but this hostility did not last long. For the Flash was mixing it up.

It would be hard for me to say what the shift in the Flash's attack was. Perhaps it was no shift at all, merely a change in tempo. His teeth bared, crouching with one shoulder upraised, he hurled himself forward, boring into Briggs' guard, arms flailing and lashing. For the first time that night Briggs gave ground, gave ground so fast that he was on the ropes before he knew it, and then he was forced to clinch. He had been rushed clear off his feet, and as the referee parted them, was forced to back away again, trying to roll with the punches, to solve the whirlwind attack the Flash was launching. And once more they were on the ropes, and an arching haymaker caught Briggs flush on the neck, crashed him into the singing ropes, head first. Between the top and second cords he shot, the force of the impact carrying his body clear out of the ring.

Briggs was in no pleasant mood when he climbed back into the ring. He saw the Flash standing there, grinning broadly. And then they were at it, hammer and tongs, standing toe to toe, guarding apparently none at all. The Flash slipped to one knee and the referee had to hold Briggs off, so furious was he. And as the Flash sprang up he rushed again, showering Briggs with pile-driving rights and lefts, flicking his leather fists with the relentless regularity of some castigating machine.

The stands were wild. The din was ear-splitting. The mighty arena was on its feet, scenting a knockout, calling for it, demanding it.

The round was nearly over. A few seconds more. Then quickly out of that welter of leaping leather tore a rapierlike thrust that caught Briggs as he tried to infight his way close to the milling fury that was the Flash—caught him mightily on his jaw as he came hurtling in mid-air. Tanned skin and live flesh met; the report could be heard to the most distant gallery. Briggs' head flew back, his body flew back. He sailed toward the canvas horizontally, hit it with a thud, skidded on his shoulder, lay like a log. Thunder from the stands. Thunder of the mob. The referee started the count. How many seconds left? Five? Ten?

"Six . . . seven . . . eight . . . nine . . . and *Ten!* . . ."

And thus was a new champion crowned.

WELL, as I intimated, the sports boys are still trying to figure it. Just how good *was* Jeff Briggs anyway? But Flash O'Donnell—alias Jock Casey—knows. Knew it right along for years.

"Sure I had his number all the time—name and number wrote right on the punch-end of my mitt. But I was kinda dumb for a while, see? Couldn't make it out. Wha'd I do? Why, I went out and got me some brains. Yessir, brother. Brains."

The HIGHGRADERS

A Western Story of Hardrock Gold

By

CHARLES ALMA BYERS

BRINGING his horse to a stop, Gandon turned in the saddle and looked back over the trail he had been traveling, thoughtfully, searchingly. Next he scanned the landscape first to the right of him and then to the left, and, finally, once more let his gaze rest upon the expanse ahead. Nowhere could he see a single moving object. Aside from himself and his mount, the parched desert stretched away toward distant hills and mountains apparently as devoid of life as a red hot griddle on a blazing fire.

Satisfied with the outlook, he drew a watch from his pocket and fell into a reckoning of time and distances.

"No, I can be making no mistake," he assured himself aloud. "Since noon I've made about twenty miles, I figure. Over that next hill ought to lie my destination."

Carefully looping the bridle reins over the saddle horn, he dismounted and turned the horse about so that it faced the back trail.

"Go to it, old scout!" he commanded, giving the animal a sharp slap on the rump. "I guess you'll find your way back to your owner, all right."

The horse started off at a dogtrot, but soon came down to a walk. Gandon watched it for a while to make sure that it was going to keep to the trail, and then, picking up the small bundle he had dropped in alighting, started off in the opposite direction.

"It's going to be a mighty long hike," he ruminated, surveying the winding, rarely traveled wagon trail ahead. "About five or six miles, I figure; just long enough, though, to bring me into the camp properly tired and travel worn."

He recalled that he might have saved himself many miles had he come in from the other railroad, lying some four miles on the opposite side of the camp, but he was sure he had done the wise thing in choosing the longer way.

"Yes," he mused, "I've got to hit the place seemingly by accident. It'll sound a lot more plausible to say I was cutting across country from one railroad to the other."

Copyright, 1928, by Charles Alma Byers.

This brought his thoughts again to the undertaking ahead of him. The first man who had gone in on a similar mission, it was suspected, had been scared out, although he ever maintained, probably to cover his cowardice, that he had found nothing wrong; and the second man, sent in about two months ago, had strangely disappeared. What had happened to him remained a mystery.

Reviewing this phase of the situation, as he fell into an even stride, a disturbing fear flitted over him, and he began, for about the hundredth time, to re-inspect his appearance. He even stopped and slipped on the coat he had been carrying with the bundle and rebuttoned his vest. Then he examined both the texture of the suit and his whole general aspect with painstaking care.

"Maybe these clothes do spell the newly released convict," he voiced to himself doubtfully, "but I'll be jiggered if they screech it. But they're the real thing, I know that; besides, they're new, and a pretty bum fit. They ought to attract attention, at least."

Then he thought of something else, and began a search of his pockets. What if he had lost it? But he had not, he discovered, as he drew a paper from an inside pocket of the coat. He read it over carefully. It attested to the fact that on a recent date a certain Pete Cossenby had been duly and legally released from San Quentin Penitentiary.

"It was a holdup price I had to pay Mr. Pete for his supposed branding togs and this, to him, less than worthless bit of paper," he decided audibly, wryly smiling, "but I thought I had to have them."

Removing the coat, and this time his vest also, Gandon once more started on. The heat was still almost intolerable, but the sun, in a little while, would disappear behind the distant peaks on his right, when, as the traveler knew, the mysterious night coolness of the desert would begin to steal forth.

Jimmy Gandon, as he journeyed on, had time to think of many things. He realized that he was probably voluntarily stepping into very grave trouble, and he was young and life was dear to him. Occasionally he found himself wishing that he had stayed out of the affair, but always, at such times, there would come to mind two thoroughly good reasons why he must now go on with it. One was no more than the mere desire to make good on an idle and perhaps rather foolish boast. The other was a certain very estimable young lady. The two reasons, it remains to be added, were closely connected, inasmuch that to make good on the former might pave the way to his winning of the subject of the latter—or, rather, prove to her father, vitally interested in his undertaking in a more direct sense, that he was capable of something more than golf and money spending.

IT WAS nearly seven o'clock when Gandon, truly tired and travel soiled, reached his destination.

Juniper, he found, was a typical little mining camp. Situated at the base of Juniper Mountain, it depended for sustenance, as he already knew, almost entirely upon the operations of the Juniper Mountain Gold Mining Company. It possessed a single general store, which also served as post office, two or three ramshackle rooming houses, a couple of gambling and refreshment establishments, and the usual assortment of other cheaply built shacks. In truth, the company was virtually a one-man-owned concern, and, the operations of this company being somewhat limited, the camp was even smaller than one-mine camps ordinarily size up to.

Gandon sank down upon a corner of the porch before the general store in genuine weariness, where he sat for a long time with his head bowed. Every muscle in his body ached.

When, at length, he began giving a little attention to things about him, he looked up to find a bearded, patriarchal old-timer standing beside the porch steps eyeing him closely. From him Gandon inquired where he might be able to get a night's lodging.

" 'Spect Widow Jensen has a spare bed, if you got money to pay for it," replied the old man, pointing to a big, rambling, barnlike structure standing a short distance away against a hillside. "That's her place over there."

Thanking the fellow, Jimmy rose stiffly to his feet and started off.

The Widow Jensen, large, rawboned and capable looking, meeting him at the door, looked him over coldly, appraisingly.

"I'm on my way out to the railroad," he began meekly. "Just reached here from

Donwell, on the S. P. I'm tired and looking for a place to sleep."

He had dropped his bundle at his feet and taken off his hat. The woman continued to eye him sharply. Evading meeting her gaze, he began, with one hand, to tug nervously at his coat lapels, first at one and then at the other.

"I've got money to pay, of course," he added.

"Come in," said the woman brusquely. Without further word, she led him through a large, littered-up living room or lobby, across a hall, and into a long sleeping room, strewn haphazardly with mangy looking army cots.

"You can use this one," she said, indicating the cot she referred to with a toe of her shoe. "Meals?" she questioned.

Gandon replied that he would like to have supper and breakfast. The price she snapped out almost staggered him, but he produced the amount in small bills and silver and passed it over to her, with a simulated look of wistfulness.

"I wonder," he began, "do you think I might find any work here? Got to find a job mighty soon, or I'll have to quit eating." He ended with a nervous little laugh.

"I doubt it," the woman replied. "The mines are the only place, and I imagine they'll shut down 'fore long. Ain't payin'. Then I'll have to go, too."

"I worked about a coal mine, once," Gandon offered, somewhat stretching the actual truth. He should have added that his father was the owner of this coal mine, and that his "work" thereat had consisted of little more than a bluff at holding down one of the desks in the office. What he did add was: "I'm willing to do anything."

"You don't look like you was used to work," the woman came back shrewdly.

"Been working in the jute—I mean in a —a factory. Not heavy," he explained. "Indoors, you know. Very confining. Need something heavier—to get my strength back—get toughened up."

Again Jimmy was nervously tugging at his prison made coat, as if trying to bring it to a more comfortable fit.

"What's your name?" asked the woman.

"Pete Cos—I mean, Pete Gandon," he stammered. "I was about to give you my full name—middle name, you see," he supplemented, registering embarrassment.

The widow studied him from head to foot, but made no comment.

"I've got to get something to do soon," he said.

"The foreman of the mines, as well as most of his men, boards here," she offered. "You might try him, but I don't think he'll have anything."

As she started out the door, she flung back: "You'll find a place to clean yourself up down at the end of the hall."

Gandon sincerely wanted a job, and he wanted it to be about the mines, if possible. The woman's information was therefore discouraging. However, since what he desired most was an excuse for remaining at the camp, he had it in mind to sham illness as a pretext for staying, if everything else failed.

But there was another thing he must also do. He must establish a certain identity—that of being an ex-convict. He realized that in doing so he might be driven out as an undesirable, but he was at least going to chance it.

Immediately proceeding to action on the plan he had formulated, he removed his coat, and then took from its inside pocket the paper he had purchased from ex-convict Pete Cossenby. The coat he flung over the foot of the bed, carefully arranging it so that the pocket hung upside down. Next he placed the paper on the floor beneath it, to give the appearance that it had dropped out accidentally. He was also careful to note its exact position in relation to the bed legs. The bundle containing socks and such articles he opened and strewed its contents about carelessly.

Finishing the work, he went to the wash room and cleaned himself up, after which, coatless, he again sought out the proprietress.

He asked the supper hour. On being told it, he announced that he was going to the barber shop.

"I haven't had a shave for nearly a week," he said, which was literally true. "I'll be back in time."

"Did you want to see the foreman tonight?" she asked. "If you do, he won't be in from the mines till 'round ten o'clock."

"No—tomorrow, after I get rested up a bit," Gandon replied, taking his leave.

He was gone less than a half hour. On his return, he went directly to his room.

He immediately saw that his scheme had worked. In fact, the paper was missing from the floor. This, by no means, pleased him, but he was sure that it must be somewhere around. And in slipping on his coat he found this to be true. It had been replaced in his pocket!

THE evening meal passed off uneventfully. The miners eyed the stranger in their midst coldly, and some of them, perhaps because of his store clothes, insolently, but none of them directly, addressed him. Shortly afterwards, Gandon went to his room and to bed. He was half aroused at different times during the night by the workmen coming to bed, but he nevertheless slept refreshingly.

On his way to the dining room the next morning he was hailed by the proprietress.

"Oh, you!" she called to him. "Pete, you said your name is, didn't you? Well, Pete, I don't know that we're very anxious to have your kind 'round here, but——"

She paused and studied his face. Gandon returned her look for a second without speaking. He wondered what was coming.

"Look here, Mrs. Jensen, be fair. Give a fellow a chance," he finally pleaded. "I expect I'm not——"

"Oh, I guess you ain't any worse than some of the others," she broke in. "I was just goin' to tell you that maybe you're lucky. One of the men was killed last night—shot."

She gave the information with no more feeling than if she were reciting a bit of stale gossip.

"Shot!" Gandon exclaimed, startled. "How? Accidentally?"

"Maybe—and maybe not," she replied, with a cold smile. "Maybe he talked too much. He always did when he was drinkin'. He was drunk last night."

"That's too bad," Jimmy remarked feelingly.

A big, burly man, with a face that suggested a none too friendly bulldog, stepped through a door just as the young man spoke. The woman beckoned to him.

"Morgan," she said, as he approached them, "this is the fellow I was tellin' you about. Says his name's Pete—something."

"Gandon," the same supplied. He knew, of course, that he was meeting the foreman.

The man Morgan turned upon him eyes that he thought were the coldest and most piercing he had ever looked into. They deliberately studied him from head to foot, as the eyes of a horse trader habitually examines a horse.

"Got a notion you want to work, eh?" he eventually asked, openly sneering. "What do you know 'bout minin'?"

"Not much, I guess," Gandon admitted. "Worked about a coal mine for a while. Then I came West and studied to be an assayer, until——"

"Don't need no 'sayers here," Morgan interrupted, in disgust.

"But I want real work. Want to get my strength back."

"You look 'bout as husky as a tadpole now," Morgan came back, and laughed boisterously.

Indeed, Gandon was somewhat too slight of build, though of good height, but—which did not show because of his ill-fitting clothes—he was really firm of muscle and a well conditioned athlete. Also, when properly garbed and not acting a false rôle, he was rather a handsome chap, with clear gazing blue eyes and features that spelled spirit and determination.

"I know," he agreed with the foreman. "Have been too confined—to indoor work. I want to toughen up."

Morgan and the woman exchanged meaning looks, which Gandon noted and understood. The widow had not only told the foreman of the stranger's want of a job, but also had informed him about the paper.

"Well," drawled Morgan, his gaze searchingly upon Gandon's face, "I ought to tell you to beat it, but I'm short a man this mornin'. You're not goin' to be much good, but maybe I can use you till I get somebody else. You'll go out with the noon bunch, and make up your mind right now you got to work."

He started to turn away, but stopped to add: "But get some decent clothes. Got money?"

"Not much," Gandon replied.

The foreman scribbled a few words on a scrap of paper and handed it to him.

"Go over to the store and get fitted out. It'll be taken out of your pay."

ARRIVING at the mines with the ingoing shift, Gandon found Morgan awaiting him. He was quick to discern that the works were operated by a long tunnel penetrating into the side of the mountain, with the usual lot of roughly built framework about the mouth for handling the output. The tunnel, at the mouth, was timbered, on the square-setting method, and contained tracks for the ore cars, the latter extending out on trestling for the dumping of the cars either into the quartz bins or on the huge pile of muck, or waste. And he knew that far back inside would doubtless be a veritable network of drifts, cross-cuts, lifters, and so forth, where the drillers and stopers would be at work following the vein.

Morgan called to two of the men—one of them hardly more than a boy—that had come out with Gandon.

"Tom," he said, "this bird's goin' to help you. He's green. Better put him to trammin', and have the kid here help him till he gets onto it."

Gandon subsequently learned that the man addressed as Tom was his shift boss, and that the boy was, ordinarily, a driller's helper.

The green miner, although he had found the work much lighter and easier to get into the swing of than he had anticipated, went to bed after his first day of labor tired and sore, but quite satisfied. The second day passed somewhat as had the first, with his task becoming still more familiar to him.

But, so far, he was learning nothing of what he had actually set out to learn. Was his trip to prove useless, after all? He discerned that he was being closely watched, by the foreman and others, both on the job and off, but he could detect nothing wrong about the way the mines were being operated.

It was on the third day that an incident occurred, brought about by himself intentionally, that filled Gandon, at the moment, with both fear and a little hopefulness. When he knew Morgan to be watching him, from a place of concealment, he picked up from the car he was attending a piece of ore uncommonly rich in gold and studied it closely. Then, pretending to look surreptiously about, he made a move as if to conceal the specimen somewhere about his person; but finally, seeming to change his mind, tossed it rather reluctantly back into the car.

A moment later the foreman stepped up to him.

"A little 'tack of itchin' palms?" he asked, smiling.

Jimmy confusedly endeavored to explain that he was only admiring the specimen's richness.

"Studied 'saying once, did you say?" Morgan went on. "Think you know somethin' 'bout gold, eh?"

The other meekly admitted that he knew a little.

"Come to my room at the Widow's tonight at 'leven," he commanded, starting off. "Want to see you."

NOT wanting to appear in any way inquisitive, Gandon thus far had avoided any participation in the night life of the camp, but after coming off work that night he decided to see what it had to offer. Possibly he could learn something to his advantage. Besides, it would help to kill time. However, with no money he dared spend before his first pay day, he was treated as a rank outsider, and soon left. Moreover, he was nervous. What did Morgan want to see him about? Was he going to be ordered out of the camp—before he had accomplished anything?

He reached the boarding house a full hour before necessary. Sleeping in a room shared by eight or ten other men, he had scarcely any way of enjoying absolute privacy, in case he was under suspicion and being watched, but in a corner of the wash room he brought forth the automatic he had carried strapped to his person underneath his clothing and placed it in one of his coat pockets. He wanted it where it would be more convenient.

At exactly eleven Gandon tapped at Morgan's door. Invited to come in, he confronted not alone Morgan, but two other men—both miners, and two of about the hardest-faced characters he had ever seen. Only the foreman greeted him, who at the same time motioned him toward the only vacant chair.

"Done time in the pen, have you?" Morgan immediately shot out at him.

Gandon was too much taken aback by the abruptness of the question to make more than a mumbled, half acquiescence to the charge.

"Tryin' to get 'way from anything out here?" the foreman next fired at him, his expressionless eyes boring through him like cold steel, eyes that missed nothing.

"No—o. No," came Gandon's response hesitantly.

"No?" returned Morgan.

Jimmy thought he probably detected the foreman's object, and accordingly, shamming innocence, played into his hands.

"No, Mr. Morgan," he replied. "I didn't escape. Did full time. Got my paper right here." And he drew the discharge document from his pocket and handed it to the questioner.

The man snatched it from his hand and looked it over closely. Then he passed it on to one of the other men, who, after studying it equally carefully, handed it to the other.

"It's the real thing, all right," said the second one.

For fully a minute the foreman scanned the face of Gandon without speaking.

"Well, Pete," he then began, "we got a little proposition to make you. This is Placer Dugan and that over there is Tim Johnson." He pointed first toward one of his men and then at the other.

Gandon, as well as the men indicated, acknowledged the introduction with a silent nod.

"Want to make some big money?" Morgan now questioned, again turning to Jimmy.

"Well," parried the latter, "I've lost a lot of time getting started on the road to wealth. But I don't want to eat any more grub in stir. Is—is the big money you mention safe?"

"Nothin' 'zactly safe," said the foreman, smiling. "You can get killed dodgin' automobiles, or by a rock fallin' on you in the safest mine in the world, or you can get yourself locked up by peddlin' moonshine, beatin' your wife, or 'bout a million other things. No, nothin' 'zactly safe. If a feller's too all-fired timid to take a chance he'd better fill his pockets with dynamite and jump down a deep well."

"But I'm not hankering to go back to the jute mills right away," again protested Gandon, smiling.

"Well, young man, you can just bet your chewers that we fellers ain't takin' any unnecessary chances," Morgan returned. "Besides, our proposition's just as safe as runnin' a bank, eh, fellers?" he ended with a look toward the other men.

"Hell of a heap safer," affirmed the smaller one and nodded his head wisely.

"Sure is," agreed the other.

"I reckon," began Gandon slowly, "that if the rest of you can chance it I can. I need money mighty badly. I've got a sister that needs my help, and she hasn't been getting it."

"Good!" Morgan exclaimed. "Now here's the lay. The mines're producin' a lot of gold that ain't goin' into the bins—ain't even comin' outside. Get that?"

Gandon pretended disbelief, and the other men smiled.

"No, sir," the speaker went on. "We hain't spent any of it yet, but we will. We're storin' it up—for a rainy day, eh, fellers?"

"I don't get you," said Jimmy.

"Tell you how it is," the foreman proceeded. "The tunnel we're workin' in makes a right smart swerve out toward one of the company's property lines. The ground on the other side of this line has been held for years as a claim by an old duffer named Turner. He's been holdin' it down with assessment work, but gettin' nothin' out of it. He run in a tunnel from the side, but when he got to the Juniper line had to quit. Later he started another. The old one has been abandoned about two years. It didn't have any pay stuff then, but it has a hell of a lot of it now, all right."

The man stopped to chuckle, as if over some huge joke.

"Yes, we've filled it pretty full of some mighty fine stuff," he shortly resumed. "You see, all we had to do was run off a short incline shaft from the Juniper tunnel and tap it. It holds a good many tons of the best ore the Juniper ever turned out."

"Is that what you call highgrading?" asked Gandon, showing keen interest.

"That's what some people'd call it," admitted Morgan, "but we call it clippin' coupons."

Again he paused to laugh.

"You see," he went on, "we're takin' you in on a big thing. You're lucky. You're steppin' into Booze Banda's shoes, right when the melon's gettin' 'bout ripe enough to pick. Booze couldn't be trusted when he got drunk, which he did whenever he had a chance, and he was bumped off the other night."

"He's the fellow whose place I'm taking in the mines?" Gandon inquired.

"Yes," the foreman replied. "You also take his place in our organization. We need another man, to work on the ore cars. So tomorrow you'll take the graveyard shift, 'stead of the one you've had. We only do our coupon clippin' durin' the after-midnight run, 'cause it's safer then. That don't mean we let anything very rich get by, though. The men in the back end hold up the cream of the other shifts and pass it out only when we can handle it."

"How many of us are there?" was Jimmy's next question.

"Eight, includin' you. But let me say right now, the stuff's to be split nine ways—two to me and one apiece to the rest. That's satisfactory, ain't it?"

"Sure is to me," agreed Gandon heartily. "But how are we going to get the stuff out of this other tunnel, if there's to be so much of it and the tunnel belongs to this fellow Turner?"

"That's easy," Morgan responded, with another of his smiles. "Turner had an accident some time ago. A blast went off in his other diggin's when he wasn't lookin' for it, which saved him his funeral expenses. As a result, too, his assessment work for this year hain't been done and won't be. That means his claim on the property ends in another two months. Then we put up our stakes, file on it at the county seat, and it's ours. And when we've done that we get out of the Juniper and begin workin' our own mine."

"Gee, that's great!" approved Gandon. "When we remove the stuff no one will know, or even suspect, but that it's actually being mined from our own ground."

"That's it," the foreman replied. "You see, it's become pretty hard to get rid of any large amount of ore, without a heap of explainin', if you don't own a mine; so our scheme covers that, too."

The conference ended, a few minutes later, with a sharp warning for the new member of the highgraders about indulging in talk or action that might arouse suspicion.

"Remember Booze Banda," was the foreman's final injunction.

REACHING the mines the following night with the men of the after-midnight shift, Gandon again found Morgan awaiting him, and he was now presented to two more men, the stopers who were to work the richer part of the vein during the run.

The foreman also stayed with him to instruct him in his new duties. On the way back to where work was in progress Gandon closely looked for indications of the connection that had been made with the old Turner tunnel. He made no effort to conceal what he was up to, and Morgan was quick to catch on.

"That's right," the latter said amiably. "See if you can find it."

Reaching the tunnel's inside terminus, however, Jimmy was forced to admit failure. At the admission the foreman chuckled.

Instructions on how the cars were to be loaded now began. The ordinary run of ore went into the bottom, filling the car until nearly level with the top. Over this was then spread a piece of tarpaulin, and on top of it was next piled a well-rounded heap of the highgrade.

"You've got the held-back cream of the other shifts to work off," explained Morgan, when the first car had been loaded in this manner, "besides the output of your own. You can do it in the eight hours, all right, but take just a little of it at a time. All cars must go outside pretty well filled. Remember that."

The car was now started on its outward trip. When it had progressed about two hundred yards, the foreman ordered that it be brought to a stop.

"Here it is, Pete," he announced, as he removed a few fair-sized stones at one side of the tramway and brought to light a dark hole. "The shaft's just a little bigger than a man's body. It goes down on a slant of nearly forty-five degrees, and is 'bout ninety feet long. The Turner tunnel comes in on a right smart lower level."

The foreman next called attention to the fact that this secret shaft was floored and sided-in with lengthwise-running boards.

"That's done," he explained, "so the stuff'll slide down without cloggin' up. Sometimes, though, we have to go down to pile it back out of the way. And remember this, Pete: every time you leave the hole you've got to roll a rock over its mouth, and 'fore you go off in the mornin' cover it carefully. That's so nobody else'll find it."

The highgrade ore was now removed from the car and sent down the shaft, after which the tram was again started on its outward journey.

"DEVILISHLY clever," was the way Gandon later sized up the scheme to himself.

He now had the information for which he had come, but how was he to use it—how get it to the proper person? Naturally, he could not pick up and leave. That doubtless would be disastrous to the whole undertaking, as well as dangerous. He could, of course, write a letter, but that, in some way, might reach the ears of Morgan and the others, to result either in arousing suspicion or in the letter's being intercepted. Besides, as the days passed, he was forced to the realization that he was now never alone—at least never when off duty or outside the boarding house. Somebody—usually Placer Dugan—was always finding some pretext for accompanying him wherever he went.

His first full pay day came without his having yet reached a decision. It was then that, realizing he would get nowhere in the matter without taking a big fling with chance, he resolved on a bold move. He would act openly—at least, to all outward appearances.

First, during moments he was able to steal away to himself in the boarding house, he wrote a long letter, in as limited writing space as a fine hand made possible. Then, selecting a time when he knew Morgan to be at the general store, he set out for the post office, with Dugan, as usual, joining him on the way. Boldly he entered the store and passed on back to the post office section. He immediately purchased a money order, made payable to his sister, for a part of his pay, and then, after also buying a stamped envelope, began looking about as if hoping to find a discarded piece of writing paper. Finally, he went to a counter where bundles were wrapped and tore off a small piece of wrapping paper.

He had, from almost the first, been conscious of Morgan's eyes upon him. He also thought that he had seen Dugan give the foreman some sort of signal. Nevertheless, he unconcernedly proceeded to scribble a short letter. He had scarcely finished it when Morgan sauntered up to him.

"Hello, boss," he greeted. Then, as if becoming aware of the situation, he added: "Just sending my sister, whom I told you about, some of my pay."

"Nothin' in that 'bout spectin' any big wealth?" asked Morgan stealthily, wagging a thumb toward the letter.

"I should say not," Gandon replied, handing both the letter and the already addressed envelope out to him. "Read it, Mr. Morgan. It's only fair you should."

The foreman, glancing first at the envelope, found that it was addressed to a Miss Gandon in a small town in southern California, and the letter, which he took in his own big hands, he perused carefully, discovering it to be only such a note as any man might scribble to a sister. It briefly stated that the writer had found a job; that while it was pretty hard work he was going to stick to it; that he was sending her part of his first wages, and that he hoped to be able to send her more from time to time.

Morgan handed the letter back to Gandon, watched him slip it into the envelope, seal and post it, and then walked away. When the envelope went into the mail chute, however, it contained, through a little dexterous palming, an inclosure aside from this letter and the money order.

The days that followed found Gandon regularly on his job and gradually becoming a model of efficiency. During his time off, he mingled with the other men on an equal footing, and, now with money to spend, rapidly was coming to be treated as an old-timer. However, he constantly carried a load that grew more worrying each day. He knew, also, that he was being watched closer than ever; that the slightest misstep on his part would doubtless mean his finish.

The days grew into two weeks, and finally three. Yet nothing had happened. The suspense was becoming unbearable.

Then, on a Friday afternoon, a big six-passenger automobile rolled into the camp. It carried, including the driver, five men and a woman.

The word quickly spread about that the mine president had arrived, presumably with his daughter and his directors. The camp citizens had long been hearing that the mines weren't paying and that they were likely to be closed down at any moment. Had the time now come? Many thought that it had.

Gandon, Morgan and a number of the other miners were on the long veranda of the Widow Jensen's boarding house when the car drew up before it. Morgan recalled previous unannounced visits of the president and principal owner of the mines, and, while they never pleased him, he always felt sure of being able to carry the situation off satisfactorily both to himself and to the Big Boss.

"Hello, Morgan!" greeted President Norcross pleasantly, alighting from the car and extending his hand. "How's everybody?" he added jovially, taking in the others with a broad sweep of his hand.

The other occupants of the car proceeded to alight, and the girl promptly made her way up the porch steps and to the door, without so much as a sideward glance. Here she was met by the Widow Jensen.

"Take care of my daughter, Mrs. Jensen," Norcross called out. "We'll all want something to eat later."

THE whole thing was over in a surprisingly short time.

The four men that piled out of the car on the heels of President Norcross moved like automatons. Three of them, before their quarry was aware of it, had surrounded Morgan, and, with the same quickness of action and lack of show, clasped handcuffs on his wrists. The remaining one, with Norcross, briefly confronted Gandon, who pointed out two other men. This fourth man, stepping back to the porch steps, now stood facing the men singled out, as well as the crowd on the veranda in general, with a gun in his hand.

"Sit still, all of you!" he briskly commanded. "'And keep your hands in sight."

With Morgan taken care of, two of the men who had assisted in the arrest joined the one with the gun, and soon had the others handcuffed together.

"Where are the other four?" Norcross, again confronting Gandon, inquired.

It was then that Morgan saw and understood.

"So you're the damned traitor, are you, you blankety-blank jailbird?" the foreman roared.

"You'll find two of them, Mr. Norcross," Gandon quietly replied to the president's question, ignoring Morgan's continued tirade, "out at the mines—Buckley and Santous. The other two are probably in bed."

Two men hustled off toward the mines, and the other entered the house. Less than an hour later four more miners were lined up with Morgan and the two taken with him on the veranda. The somewhat wholesale arrests had caused considerable excitement among the onlookers; but there was no untoward action, only mystification and a sort of fear as to who might be next.

"Well, Jimmy," once more spoke the president, "have we got them all?"

"A clean sweep, Mr. Norcross," affirmed Gandon.

"Good, Jimmy! Bully! I never thought you'd put it over, but, by gad, you did—big! And say—that idea of sending the dope through your sister down in southern California was excellent."

Norcross, truly elated, seemed prepared to ramble on indefinitely. However, just then Mrs. Jensen and his daughter appeared at the door.

"Ah, there's Juanita!" he ejaculated. "I'll try to tell you how grateful I am, Jimmy, later. That girl! She just made me bring her along. She's been worrying her silly head off about you."

With a swoop, the girl was upon Gandon and her arms about his neck.

When he had sufficiently recovered from an enjoyed choking to become cognizant of what was going on about him again, he heard Norcross expending his exuberant enthusiasm upon the widow.

"Sorry, Mrs. Jensen," he was saying, "to be taking off some of your boarders this way, but I'll soon have a lot more for you. The mines will be closed down for a few days, perhaps, but they'll soon be going bigger and better than ever."

The Secret LAGOON

By

BASIL CAREY

Preceding Events Briefly Retold

They found him dying, adrift without water in the open sea, and as the spark of life fled from him, the name of Traquair lingered in horror on his pale, young lips. Traquair! A name of fear wherever the Island schooners touch and men lust for power and gold. Among those who saw the unknown youth die was Carver, and he trembled, but not with fear, at hearing that name.

Straight to Waihiti Carver sailed after that. Traquair was at Waihiti, so it had been said. Carver had a score to settle with Traquair, one that was bitter and of years' duration. Now after long search he had located the man. Revenge would be no less sweet because of waiting.

McGinty, partner to Carver in their Island trading ventures, strove to dissuade him from this mad venture. But nothing could turn Carver aside until death had settled the balance between them. Once, years before, Traquair had thrust a treacherous knife in Carver's ribs, and had made off with the Dreaming God, a Chinese idol of gold, beautiful and beyond price. Not a thing a man might easily forget.

At Waihiti they find Traquair. The man is about to sail on his schooner, the *Amaranth*, with his partner Nicode. These two are a powerful pair, ruthless and strong, even though Nicode has not the will of Traquair. Carver and McGinty face them in the beach trading store. Little is said, but, in a second, the room is ablaze with flaming guns. The lamp is quenched, and Traquair and Nicode escape. They make for their vessel and are gone before Carver finds them again.

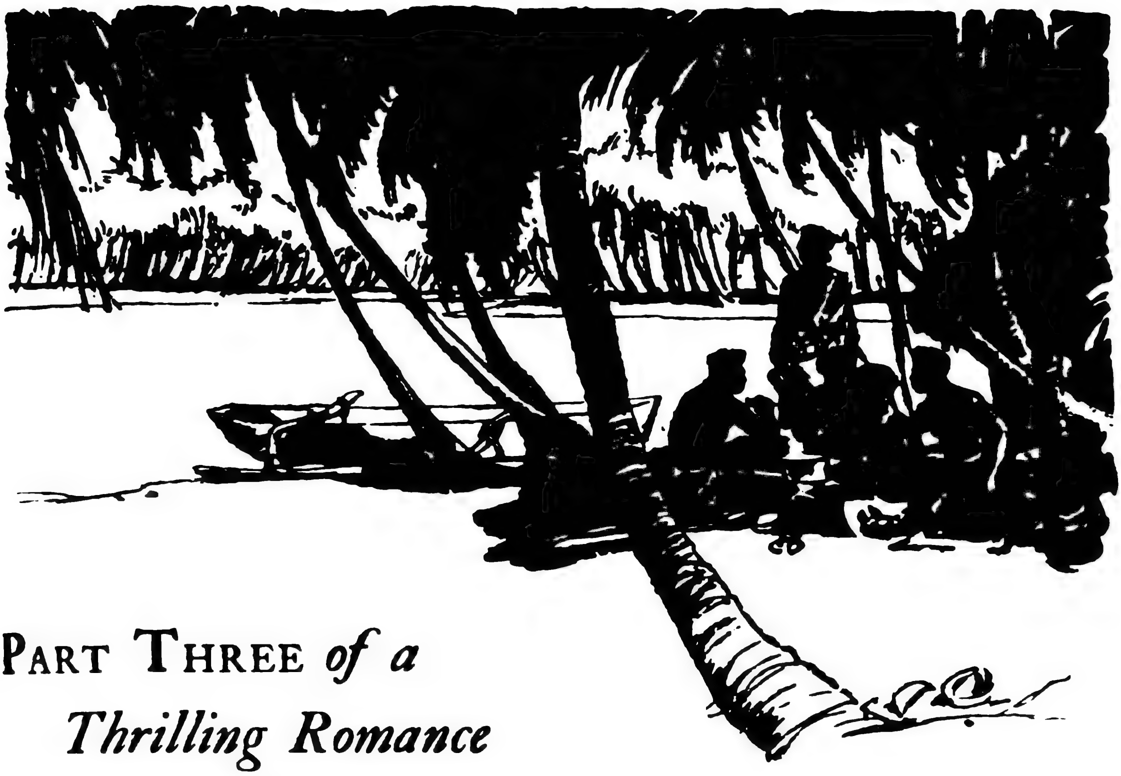
And behind them they leave Judith, daughter of Nicode, just blooming to womanhood, innocent, but wise in Island ways and endowed with the fighting spirit of her father. She defies Carver, when he tries to make her tell the destination of the *Amaranth*. She is not one from whom a secret is easily forced.

Carver forces the secret from a native. The *Amaranth* is bound for Parawa. Swiftly Carver and McGinty set sail in pursuit. And when they are well away, they find, stowaway in the hold of their *Nancy Q*, Judith, daughter of Nicode. She fights like a spitfire, but is helpless. It had been her intention to hide until the *Nancy Q* caught up with the *Amaranth*, and then to warn her father and Traquair, whom she half loves. Now that she has been discovered she knows not what to do.

All unsuspecting, the *Amaranth* reaches Parawa, and glides into the secret lagoon through the hidden passage where none may follow without knowing the way. There Poldhu awaits them, Poldhu whose business is the luring of ships to the cruel coral reefs by night, that he may loot their wrecked hulls. In the lagoon lay Poldhu's cutter, a fast, trim craft which had been so aptly named the *Wolf*.

Between Traquair and Poldhu is smouldering distrust and hatred, and their meeting is of ominous portent. Poldhu the silent; Traquair the sure.

Traquair demands the Dreaming God of Poldhu. Traquair had left it in his hands for



PART THREE *of a Thrilling Romance of the Dangerous Isles*

safekeeping. And now Poldhu tells Traquair that Morton, the third partner in the wrecking business, has fled Parawa in his lugger, the *Seamew*, taking the coveted idol of gold with him.

Traquair is possessed with berserk fury. Poldhu says that probably Morton has headed for Flanders Island to secure the help of an old friend, Lefroy, in making his escape. He advises Traquair to forget the idol. But Traquair is not easily beaten. With Nicode he sets out in pursuit of the thief. Poldhu watches the *Amaranth* disappear through the narrow passage of the lagoon. Then he returns to his hut. At the back of a cupboard is a sliding panel. He pushes it aside and enters a small room. The Dreaming God is here.

Meanwhile the *Nancy Q* is racing towards Parawa. Carver and Judith remain cold, hostile toward each other. Then Parawa is sighted. And Carver sees a ship slipping out of Parawa, out of the rock itself it seems. It is the *Amaranth*. Turning about, Carver follows the other ship, trying to keep it in sight without being detected. But the *Amaranth* is the faster boat and slowly pulls away.

On board the *Amaranth* the fires of hatred smoulder. Nicode denounces Poldhu; calls him a liar. Traquair silences him with a blow of his fist. From then on both men watch each other, suspicious, afraid.

The *Amaranth* comes safely to Flanders Island. But there is no sign of Morton. Nicode's patience breaks. He curses Poldhu for the man's treachery, for sending them on a wild-goose chase. And then, thoroughly beside himself, he accuses Traquair of helping Poldhu with his deceit. Traquair attacks him. They fight furiously. But Nicode weakens. When the battle is over, Traquair leaves the lifeless body of his partner, Nicode, on the beach. He seeks no longer for Morton but drives the *Amaranth* straight back for Poldhu's hidden lagoon.

Meantime tragedy has overtaken Carver and his party aboard the *Nancy Q*. A fight breaks out in the crew's quarters. A lamp is overturned. Soon flames are bursting from the hold, scorching the planks of the deck. The fear-maddened crew rush the only longboat and escape. Carver, McGinty and Judith are marooned on their burning ship. They are forced to seek refuge atop the mast. There they wait, above the burning decks, for rescue.

Irony sends Traquair to them. He sees a mast with three figures clinging to it, and puts the *Amaranth* about. Traquair takes the three off in his small boat. But only Judith comes aboard the *Amaranth*. Carver and McGinty are set adrift in the small open boat. The *Amaranth* heads on toward Parawa and a reckoning with Poldhu.

Thirst and hunger assail Carver and McGinty. And, too, Carver is frantic at the thought of Judith in Traquair's hands. He has, despite himself, come to love her. The days are scorching, the nights cold. Hope is dying. Then McGinty sees the green and red lights of a ship in the gathering darkness. He ties his shirt to an oar and sets it aflame. The ship pauses, then turns slowly towards them.

CHAPTER X

THE LOVE OF TRAQUAIR

JUDITH lay flat on her back staring up at an unfamiliar ceiling. Presently she sat up weakly and took stock of the cabin. Slowly her eyes traveled round its walls, past a battered locker and a coat on a peg, till they rested on Traquair. He was sitting very still, watching her. His face grew dim and she fell back on her pillow again. Sharply he clapped his hands and Tali came in with hot brandy and water and some biscuits. Traquair raised her gently and soaked the biscuit. As she ate and drank, her vision steadied. Memory came creeping back. This must be the *Amaranth*. They had been picked up. Then Carver and McGinty must be somewhere about. And where was Nicode?

"Better?" murmured Traquair.

She nodded.

"I'll soon be all right," she assured him. "Where's father?"

Traquair thought rapidly.

"We had to go to a place called Flanders Island. He's—er—staying there for a bit."

Judith frowned. "Why?"

"There's a man there we've got to watch. He may have to be there for some time. Judith, what were you doing on the *Nancy Q?*"

She told him, her voice gaining strength as she talked. When she had finished, he took her hand and raised it to his lips.

"You risked all that to warn me?"

He was gazing at her with the look of which she had dreamed. The tone of his voice did not escape her quickened senses.

"Yes, I—I wanted—I thought you——"

Why couldn't she go on?

He turned her face to his.

"Don't talk," he said. "You're worn out. Lie down and sleep for a bit. You're safe. Just remember that. That swine Carver can't get at you now."

"Is he awake yet?"

He stared at her with an expression she did not understand.

"I expect so," he said, and left her.

When he had gone she lay still, reveling in the sheer sense of being in safety. After the perils of the night, the hardness of the bunk in which she lay seemed the height of luxury and comfort. It was a pity that Nicode was not on board. Strange that he had to stay on Flanders Island. But Traquair was there. How galled Carver must feel at that moment, forced to accept the unwilling hospitality of his enemy! Where was he, she wondered? She listened intently. But there was no sound of men's voices. Now and again came a shrill cry from the deck as the Kanakas called to each other. But that was all. Where could Carver and McGinty be? On tiptoe she got up, walking unsteadily. Cautiously she opened the door and looked out. With a growing feeling that something was wrong, she went on tiptoe, every sense alert. But there was no one below. She opened three doors that led to huddled, untidy bunks, and all were empty. Someone was coming. In a queer panic she fled back to her bunk and covered herself with a blanket. Was she afraid? How absurd to be afraid!

Tali came in on tiptoe to see if she slept. When he met the glance of her blue eyes, he started a little. Then he came forward eagerly. Almost it seemed as though he wanted to tell her something. But he did not open his lips. He stooped and picked up her plate from the floor and was going out again when she called him in a low voice.

"Kahiva—where?"

Tali shook his head. She repeated the question and a look of fear crossed his face. With catlike tread he came nearer till he stood beside her.

"Kahiva not come *Amaranitee,*" he whispered and was gone.

Puzzled, she lay back and tried to discover what he meant. Carver not on board? Why not? Where could he be, then? Traquair had said he must be awake. Then Traquair knew where he was. Perhaps he didn't want her to know. But Judith had lived among the Kanakas and she knew how difficult it was to cheat those astute boys. Contact with the white man had not destroyed their preternatural senses of sight and hearing, nor had it impaired that uncanny sixth sense which makes it almost impossible to keep a secret from them. If Tali said that Carver had not come aboard, then the chances were that Tali was right. What mystery lay at the back of all this?

When Traquair came down an hour later, treading softly in his bare feet, he found her restless and bright-eyed. Quickly his mind sped over the events of the day. Could she possibly have guessed that Carver was not on board? He sat down and took one of her hands in his.

"Want to come on deck?"

"Where's Carver?" she said abruptly, looking straight at him.

"He's not aboard. He's—a lugger came along and took off him and McGinty. Going back to Waihiti, she was, and I shoved 'em aboard."

She thought: "That's a lie." But she did not say so. In her astute brain a warning had sounded. Where was the old magic that Traquair once had? The spell he had cast on her in Waihiti was vanishing, grown faint and powerless before a disturbing conviction that something was wrong. But she said nothing. Life with Nicode had taught her the value of silence.

"Let's forget them," said Traquair. "Judith, have you ever realized just how beautiful you are?"

He caught a strand of her hair between his fingers, twisting it like silk. He had loved many women, but none of them had quite the same appeal as this straight slip of a girl who gazed up at him so fearlessly. He smiled with a touch of complacence. Had she not shown by her acts that she loved him? For what other reason would a woman risk life and possibly honor as she had done? And Nicode was not there to frown on him, to say him nay until he should produce the promised share of the spoils. He and Judith were alone on the wide sea. Who was there to say him nay?

His hands slid to her arms and then to her shoulders. He bent over her as she lay there until his lips found hers. But in his eyes was no tenderness, no pity.

In a flash the thought of Poldhu crossed his mind. He was going back to Parawa, and he was grimly determined to choke the truth out of Poldhu. The man would be a dangerous adversary, he reflected. He had seen the fate of several of Poldhu's enemies. This did not daunt him. One had to die sometime. Why not on one's feet, fighting up to the last breath? It would be a better death than most. Yet it would be a pity to die before Judith had come to his arms.

When he lifted his head she had her face in her hands. He did not touch her again. Too well he knew the caution, the slow caresses that must overcome the fierce shyness of a maid. He was content now to stand away, to answer Tali's cry from the deck. He left her, secure in the knowledge that he had awakened her at last.

When he had gone she sat up, her chin cupped in her hands, her thoughts in a whirl. But she was not thinking of his kisses. She was thinking of Carver. Instinctively she knew that Traquair had lied when he said a Waihiti boat had taken off McGinty and Carver. Yet she could not fathom his reasons. Besides, Tali had said that they had never come aboard. Suddenly she tossed her head. It didn't matter what had happened to Carver. She did not care. If he was Traquair's enemy, he was hers as well. No matter what had befallen him, she did not care. On her mouth she could still feel Traquair's kisses. Oh, he was tall and strong and a man. She was his if he wanted her. And he did want her. She saw it in his eyes, she heard it in the tone of his voice. Blindly, wilfully, she shut her eyes to the cruelty that betrayed itself in his mouth, the hint of the tiger that lurked in the touch of his hands. Out of her dreams she had made for herself a Traquair who had never existed. Like most women, she was in love with an image that she had created with her own hands.

Presently she went on deck. The *Amaranth* was making a good pace in her hurry to reach the south. The sails tautened under the breeze and the wind shouted in the cordage. It was late afternoon and the sun was on its way home. From the helm Traquair smiled at her. She wandered about the deck, rejoicing in the feel of solid planks beneath her feet. By and by she went across to him.

"Where's the longboat gone?" she said.

CHAPTER XI

THE COMING OF WISDOM

HOGAN leaned against the door of his store and watched the *Fanny Jones* lumbering towards Waihiti. She was a trading schooner, squarerigged, and her skipper was a stocky man called Andrews, noted among the islands for tenacity of purpose and a remarkable facility of language. Hogan smiled. It had been dull on Waihiti of late. He missed

Nicode and Judith. Judith! That baggage had cost him some hours of frantic anxiety before he frightened the truth out of Huahe. Well, it was just like her to be off on a wild-goose chase that might land her Heaven knew where. And where had she gone with Carver? In chase of Traquair, evidently. But where was Traquair? He knew enough of Judith to be quite sure that Carver had not learned the other's destination from her. His boy had told him that Kukeke had sailed with Carver as well. Hogan shook his head, sorely puzzled at the course of events.

Bill Parsons hove in sight. He was still heavily swathed in grubby bandages. He had seen the *Fanny Jones*.

"Andrews is well ahead of his time," he said to Hogan, sitting down painfully on the step.

"Never knowed him behind but once," returned Hogan, "an' that was when he hit a storm south of Amanu. It took him five days over his time and the old *Fanny Jones* came in lookin' like she'd risen from the dead, topmast gone, and her sails tore to ribbons. There was a hole stove in her sides and the Kanakas was nearly killed with balin' night and day. But blow me if the trade goods weren't all right. How he'd kept 'em safe, God knows. But there wasn't a damn thing lost, barring a case of tinned tomatoes that got washed overboard. Andrews come in here lookin' like a bloomin' ghost, eyes like saucers and his face all of a-twitch. 'Why didn't you put back to Amanu?' I says to him. 'You must have been nearer there than here.' He drinks down a glass and then he looks at me, solemn as an owl. 'I've never put back in my life,' he told me. 'And why? Because the day that I do will be my last.' Superstitious, see? He's got the idea that it's unlucky for him to turn back. Thinks he'd meet his death before he got into port. Aw, well, we're all touched somewhere."

Bill cleared his throat suggestively. Hogan remained impervious.

"What's he bringing?" enquired Parsons at last. "Anything new?"

"Well, I give him an order for a new gramophone record," said Hogan doubtfully. "I ain't bought any these three years, and the old ones is nearly worn out."

"A song?" asked Parsons with interest.

"A girl singin'," returned Hogan with pride. "I thought it 'ud amuse young Judith. Wonder when we'll see her again?"

Parsons shook his head dubiously. He had his own warped opinion of Judith's absence. The dingey from the *Fanny Jones* was putting off. They could see Andrews' stocky body among the brown forms of the swarming Kanakas.

"Who's those other two?"

"Blowed if I know. The tall one— Say, don't the tall one look like it might be Carver?"

"Carver? What the blazes would he be doin' aboard the *Fanny Jones?* Ain't he got his own ship?"

The shout of the steersman came faintly as they watched with eager eyes. The dingey bucketed over the opening into the jade water of the lagoon. Already the islanders were wading out to meet it. Hogan hurried down to the water's edge, Bill Parsons following more slowly. His wound had gained him many sympathetic drinks. It would not be wise to allow himself to recover too rapidly. The dingey was nearly in. By the time he joined Hogan, it was grating on the beach.

"'Lo, Hogan," came Andrews' throaty voice. "I got McGinty here. He could do with a drop of the best, I'm thinkin'."

He leaped ashore. After him Carver climbed out, slowly, uneasily, like a man whose limbs are bound by cramp. Between them they got McGinty ashore. He was in a high fever. A couple of Kanakas took him at Hogan's bidding and carried him up to the store. Carver stumbled after them, refusing help. Hogan looked at Andrews for an explanation. That worthy shook his head.

"Don't ask me what's been happenin'. I don't know nothin'. I picked 'em up night before last in an open boat. We were comin' up from Amanu quick, 'cos I started a bit late. 'Bout nine o'clock we saw a flare, very low down on the water. We put about and found 'em. They were all in. Burnt their shirts to make that flare. Guess we got to 'em just in time. The wind was risin' and they'd have had a damn poor chance. I ain't heard of any storms, have you?"

"No. Think they struck a reef?"

"Couldn't say. Look, Carver's fallen."

Somehow they got him to the store and carried him into the room where he and McGinty had slept before. McGinty lay on the bed, breathing heavily. He was shivering, yet his hands burned to the touch.

"It'll have to be sweated out of him," said Hogan, and went to fetch all the available blankets. Carver lay stretched on a mattress in the corner of the room. They gave him some brandy, neat, and let him lie. In less than five minutes he had fallen into a deep sleep. They turned their attention to McGinty, and for the rest of the day they labored over him, holding him down when he tried to throw off the blankets. At intervals they gave him water, watching anxiously as he gulped it down. Towards nightfall he grew violent and they called in two stalwart boys to help. The witch doctor had arrived with loud protestations of skill. Hogan swore violently at him, and he retired in dudgeon, to content himself with weaving spells in the midst of an admiring and awestruck circle. A lamp stood in the middle of the room and Hogan closed the windows to keep out the swarm of moths that crowded around the light.

Presently McGinty's struggles grew less. His hoarse mutterings ceased. Exhausted, he lay silent among the blankets. Carver slept heavily. A lizard came in through the door and scuttled across the floor. Far off sounded the drums of the reef on their never-ending roll. A sudden convulsive movement came from the bed. Hogan flung himself on McGinty, calling to the others to lend their weight. McGinty was shouting. They forced him down again. All night they watched by him, till their eyes were red and sore from want of sleep. Towards dawn he slept.

HOGAN and Andrews stretched themselves and went to the door to see the sun rise. The cool air of morning blew in from the sea. Black against the graying sky, the *Fanny Jones* rocked at her moorings outside the lagoon. Already the pigeons were awake, quarreling angrily over their breakfast. A silent form stole out from among the palms near the water's edge. It was Hogan's boy Takete, going to fish. Hogan filled his pipe.

"What do you make of it?"

"Guess we've heard enough from McGinty's ravin's to see how the land lies," returned Andrews. "Traquair, eh? Well, I'm not surprised. What a swine he is! Why don't someone shoot him?"

"Let him wait," said Hogan somberly. "Carver's after him. He'll get him in the end, I think."

"That girl, Judith, that McGinty keeps hollerin' about?"

"No. Reckon he don't care about her. It's something else—something Traquair stole from him."

"Then Carver will get it back or do him in," was Andrews' conclusion. "Get's what he wants, does Carver."

"So does Traquair."

Andrews spat contemptuously.

"That hound!"

They went in and found McGinty sleeping naturally. The fierceness of the fever had spent itself. Another few days should see him all right. His hardy constitution would soon throw off illnesses which would prostrate a landsman for a couple of weeks. Carver had shifted his position. He lay on his back, one arm behind his black head. In the cold light he looked thin and pinched. His chest was bare and Andrews exclaimed at the scar that showed there.

"Someone meant to do him in when they gave him that."

"Traquair did it," said Hogan, and Andrews nodded.

"If it's like that between 'em, they'll not rest till one of them's killed the other."

The sun was up, and Andrews' boys were unloading the *Fanny Jones*. Across the lagoon their voices came on the wind as they struggled with unwieldly cases and sharp-edged boxes. By degrees the white beach became strewn with goods. In the store, Hogan was busy counting and checking, while Andrews wiped the sweat from his face as he shouted to the boys, urging them to hurry. He wanted to get cleared and away before nightfall. The interior of the store looked like a bargain sale. On the counter china vases, shoes, an alarm clock, glass beads, two sewing machines, a pile of Police Gazettes, half a dozen flamboyant handkerchiefs, and a bolt of striped cotton, jostled each other in confusion. Apart on a chair was a cardboard box containing the sacred gramophone record, complete with a box of needles. Takete was busy stocking the lower shelves with canned goods—tomatoes, pork-and-beans, corned beef. His dark eyes glistened at the gay colors on the wrappers. His brown hands caressed the smooth surfaces with sensuous, childish enjoyment. At the door a group of children gathered, shrieking with delight when Hogan tossed them a bit of string or a strip of corrugated cardboard. A smell of tobacco filled the air as Hogan wrenched open the lid of a case and disclosed roll on roll of twist. Some new rope had come, too, and the scent of tar mingled with the many odors that filled the room. A slant of sunlight fell across the floor, and Takete left his cans to close the shutter. Soon it would be very hot.

Into this confusion came Carver, awake at last, gaunt and hungry. He walked painfully.

"Takete," said Hogan, "you stop put cans, you go make Kai-Kai belong Kahiva. Make plenty taofe all same strong."

Takete left his cans reluctantly and vanished to make ready a meal for Carver.

"Sit down," said Hogan. "He won't be long. Hell, not on that chair!" Hastily he grabbed at the record. "There. All right. Do you know how much this thing cost? I'm goin' to try it presently. McGinty all right?"

Carver nodded.

"Feel better?" asked Andrews.

"Yes. These the new goods?"

"After you've eat a bit," said Hogan, "I'll have Takete give you a good rub with oil. It'll loosen yer joints. You're movin' like one of them wooden dolls. What're you doin'?"

Carver had cleared a space on the overloaded counter. In his hand he held McGinty's belt. He laid it down carefully and began to count out the money that lay hidden there. Andrews and Hogan stopped, watching with fascinated eyes as the piles of dollar-bills grew higher. Slowly Carver opened his own belt and added his store. Presently he looked up at Andrews.

"You going on to Lafayette?"

"Yes."

"Is Darcy still wanting to sell the *Kestrel?*"

"He might be," said Andrews. "He hadn't sold it when I was over, six weeks ago."

"Think there's enough here to buy it?"

Andrews looked at the heap of bills and nodded.

"I should say just about. Why? Thinkin' of buyin'?"

"Yes. I'll sail so far with you, if you're starting soon."

"I want to start before the day's out," Andrews told him. "But what about McGinty? He ain't fit to sail, is he?"

"He'll stay here with me," said Hogan. "It ain't but three days' journey to Lafayette. Carver'll be back in a week's time."

"And where'll you make for when you've got her?" Andrews asked curiously.

Carver flung back his head.

"Parawa," he said.

II

THE *Amaranth* was in sight of Parawa. Far to the south, the island loomed gaunt and rocky against the blue. Seen thus, it had a sinister aspect a hard, jagged outline that gave no hint of the hidden lagoon at its heart. To Judith, watching with strained eyes from the deck, it seemed a wild, forsaken place. A vague feeling of uneasiness stole over her. Had it seemed so unapproachable, so terrible, when she had seen it from the deck of the *Nancy Q?* She had a sharp sense that something waited for them on Parawa, some secret, terrible thing that threatened them with—what?

From Traquair she could learn but little. He had grown silent and taciturn. In vain she tried to make him talk to her, to tell her the ultimate cause for this hurried voyage. But he would not. He was not like himself, Judith reflected. Why had he started up in the middle of supper the night before, to stand listening like a man who fears he knows not what? He had left his meal unfinished and gone on deck. When she sought him later he had laughed and made light of it. But she was not satisfied. Something of dread had crept into the air as the *Amaranth* threshed her way south through the tumbling water.

In Judith's heart a tiny seed of fear sprouted, to grow presently into a tree whose shadow clouded her whole being. Unanswered questions were thronging her mind. There was so much that Traquair had not explained. The mysterious disappearance of the longboat, the absence of her father, the whereabouts of Carver and McGinty—to all these demands he had replied evasively.

Though she had persuaded herself that Carver was nothing to her, she thought of him constantly. Gradually it became imperative that she should know exactly what had happened. At first, in the sheer relief of safety her mind had been swept clear of everything except the thought that the hand of Death had been stayed. They had not come straight back to Parawa. They had made a detour to the east that had taken nearly three days. Their object was a tiny island set all alone in the heaving sea. Traquair had gone ashore without her. He had returned with something wrapped carefully in a bundle, which he had conveyed to the farthest cabin, whose door he had locked. It had been dark when he landed and when he returned, nor did he go near the end cabin, which was never unlocked. Judith would have given much to know what it contained. After that the *Amaranth* had turned south again.

What had become of Carver? As the days went by, the question filled Judith's mind. Had she dared, she would have asked Traquair again. But his sullen bearing, his preoccupied air, forbade her. Sometimes she would look up to see him staring at her with something in his eyes that she could not read. Since that first time he had neither touched her nor kissed her. Yet she knew that the hour would come when he would not be satisfied with less than all. This it was that had set a little cold wind fluttering round her heart. Defiantly she told herself, "Well, I love him. Next time the padre comes from Amanu he can marry us." Resolutely she put out of her mind tales that she had heard. Nicode would see that things were all right. Nicode would insist on the conventions. But Nicode was on Flanders Island . . . .

She stood in the bows, staring across the heaving sea at the dim island of Parawa. Traquair was not on deck. Tali was steering, his brows knitted in a frown, his lips pursed in a shape that betokened intense concentration. Over Judith there swept an impetuous desire to know the truth. She crossed the deck and stood just behind him.

"Tali."

"Yes, Yuditi?"

"You tell me true where Kahiva go. True, savvy? All same mitinari (missionary) true."

Tali's scared eyes swept the deck. He spoke very low. She bent her head to catch the words.

"Tarakawa no let Kahiva and Maginitee come on *Amaranitee*. Say stop in longboat, no come this time on *Amaranitee*."

"Tarakawa leave Kahiva in longboat?"

"Yes, Yuditi."

His troubled eyes were on hers.

"Oh, Yuditi, suppose Tarakawa savvy Tali tell you 'bout Kahiva Tarakawa kill."

"Not tell Tarakawa," Judith promised.

But there was something else. One brown hand left the tiller and fastened on her arm. Over the dark face spread a look in which terror and an odd pity were mingled.

"Oh, Yuditi, Nicoti he——"

A step on the companion, and Traquair's fair head appeared. He came on deck. Tali was bent over the tiller, Judith leant idly against the mast. He glanced sharply from one to the other. Had he heard the sound of voices? But the listless attitude of the girl deceived him. Surely if she had learned but a fragment of the truth she would have greeted him very differently. His longing grew every time he looked at her. Was he a fool to deny himself what the careless gods had flung into his hands? Yet—wait. Wait until he settled with Poldhu, wait until the Dreaming God was safe aboard the *Amaranth*. Wait till he had the golden hours to spend as he would, when man's business had been ended, and the time was his own. The hour was not yet. Judith was not ready. Should he spoil things by snatching too soon and too roughly at his desire? Rather wait until the shadow of Poldhu was lifted from the warm, sleepy nights and dreaming days.

He took the tiller from the Kanaka. They were getting near the island. Carefully he worked the *Amaranth* until the island loomed above them, dark and sinister. Judith was forgotten. All his mind was intent on the dangerous passage through the sunken reefs. It absorbed him utterly. Fascinated, Judith watched him as he coaxed the *Amaranth* inshore. To her it seemed that certain death lay before them. The sea birds flew screaming about the boat as she fought her way into port. It took all Traquair's skill and strength to make an entry through the narrow channel of deep water that wandered among the treacherous reefs.

As she watched him Judith became conscious of the strength that lurked in those hands and in the arms where the veins knotted with effort. So that was what had happened to Carver. At the thought a great anger surged up in her heart. Traquair had taken his enemies from the midst of one peril to set them in another. Impossible to pretend any longer that she did not care what had become of Carver. Memories of his strength, his unwearied arms that had kept hold of her through the long hours of suspense, brought swift, unaccustomed tears to her eyes. For the first time she saw Traquair as he was. The weak infatuation that she had called her love for him wilted and died before her honest scorn of a man who would leave another human being to the mercy of the sea. Suppose that Carver had told her the truth about Traquair! She had been a fool, a blind, blind fool. And what would the end of it be?

At the thought of what it might very well be, she shivered. Something like panic seized her. For what pity could she hope at the hands of a man like Traquair? The strength, the overbearing mastery that she had gloried in, became a menace whose terror sent the blood ebbing from her cheeks. She longed for her father. What had Tali been about to tell her when they were interrupted? A thought went through her brain like a knife. Traquair had lied about Carver. Then probably he had lied about Nicode. If so, who could say what had happened to her father? She leaned against the mast, trying vainly to collect her thoughts. Whatever happened, she must not let Traquair know that she had found out even part of the truth. In the days that were coming she must use every wit she possessed, every scrap of cunning until—until Nicode came to her help.

"Oh, Yuditi, Nicoti, he——"

She must make Tali tell her what had occurred on Flanders Island. She must know exactly what she had to face. Without haste she strolled to the companion and went below. In the cabin she moved restlessly up and down. How could she find out without arousing Traquair's suspicions? Some bananas lay on the table. She took some of the golden fruit and ate it listlessly. She wondered what Carver was eating, and whether indeed, he was eating at all. Small chance had that longboat of coming safe to shore, or even of being picked up by a stray lugger. Before her eyes rose a picture of a storm-tossed boat with three men in it who would neither move nor speak again.

SHE fled from her own thoughts to the rolling deck. They were very near Parawa. The cliffs loomed high above them, and she saw now the slit in the face of the rock for which Traquair was making. On went the ship, and slid through the passage as easily as though it were half a mile wide. They entered the blue water of the hidden lagoon. A boat was there. As he stared at the *Wolf*, Traquair's blood roared through his veins. All the concealed rancor, which had filled his soul when he thought of Poldhu, leaped into life. But before he killed him he must find out what Poldhu had done with the God of Fuchow.

The anchor chains rattled, and a hundred colored fishes swam madly away as the iron monster descended among them from the sky. The Kanaka boys shouted joyfully. They had been many days at sea. For them Parawa meant lazy days in the shade of the palms, lazy nights round the beach fires, long bouts of Kava drinking, sleep endless and satisfying. They sang as they hauled at the ropes. Traquair went below. Judith seized the chance. It might not recur.

"Tali," she said, quietly.

He glanced at her as he coiled a rope.

"Where is Nicoti?"

"Oh, Yuditi," said the soft voice. "Nicoti he die. Tarakawa an' Nicoti, dey fight, fight all same long time. Tali hide, see Nicoti die. Tarakawa he kill Nicoti."

"On Flanders Island?"

"So, Filiana, Yuditi."

Judith swung herself onto the cabinhead, and tried to think. The wind blew her hair into her eyes, and she was glad, for it hid the tears that shone there. Though she and Nicode had cared very little for each other, it hurt her cruelly to know that he was dead. There had been a fight, Tali said. She could picture how the two bodies had swayed and grappled and fallen; how one of them had risen and the other had lain still. Her father would be no match for the strength of Traquair. And this was the man she had thought she loved. This was the man whom she had risked everything to warn. Had she but told Carver his destination none of these things could have happened. If Carver had reached Parawa in time all might have been prevented. But she, poor fool, had frustrated his plans by her obstinacy, her silence. Time was indeed bringing in his revenges. To whom could she now look for help?

Someone was standing on shore, shading his eyes with his hand. She saw a tall man, as tall as Traquair, with a determined mouth and deep-set eyes. She glanced at Traquair and saw his face darken. What lay between these two, she wondered, and how long before the clash came? Traquair was muttering to himself. She could not hear what he said. But her heart sank at thought of what the next few hours might hold. A catamaran had put out to take them ashore. In silence Traquair swung over the side and held out his arms to catch her. As she dropped into the boat and felt his hands tighten on her supple body, she knew a fear more deadly than any that had gone before. The Kanakas bent to their oars. The spray from the blades fell on her clenched hands. On the beach the waiting figure did not move or speak.

"Oh, God," said Judith in her heart, "give me a hand."

CHAPTER XII

CARVER DRIVES A BARGAIN

POLDHU'S brain was working quickly. His eyes flickered for a second as he caught sight of Judith. Trust Traquair to pick up a woman worth having! He was curious to know who she was. His skilled eye fastened on the sway of her body as she walked. She was much too lovely to be wasted on Traquair, surfeited with a hundred amours.

But she must wait. It was Traquair who clamored for attention. It was lucky that Morton was away on a journey to Kahina. Perhaps he could still throw dust in Traquair's eyes, thought Poldhu. His mind went swiftly to the thought of his share of the spoils of the *Princess Helen*. It had taken seven months to complete that job. He and Morton had worked like slaves. He grimaced at the memory of the trouble that the decoy light had given them. The hurried journey in the early dawn to the spot where the boat had sunk; the panting Kanakas, diving again and again. Morton's anxious face, at once cunning and stupid, staring down from the *Wolf's* bows; himself, naked, with a diving helmet on, going down through the blue water, till his searching hands fastened on the thing he sought, all these pictures rose up before him as he watched Traquair lift Judith to shore in his great arms. His had been the work, and his should be the reward. Morton was a fool, easily contented, willing to follow where Poldhu led. But Traquair now, well . . . .

"One of us is going to be boss," said Poldhu aloud to himself, "and it's going to be me."

Traquair's eyes slid from Poldhu to Judith. It might have been better to leave her on board. But Poldhu would have found out. Besides, it was not safe to leave a woman alone with only Kanakas on the ship. Anyway, if Poldhu cast his eyes on Judith . . .

He knew the lure that someone else's possessions held for Poldhu. He must mask his real feelings concerning Judith. The very fact that Traquair desired her would be sufficient to enflame Poldhu with a determination to take her for himself. It was knowledge of this trait that had suggested to Traquair the plot by which Poldhu might be deceived.

"Well?" said Poldhu. "What luck? Did you get him?"

Traquair's lids drooped.

"No. Either he didn't go to Flanders Island, or else someone else was the thief."

"You're sure he didn't go northeast?"

"The *Seamew's* a slow boat," retorted Traquair. "If he'd gone that way, I'd overtaken him or else found him at Flanders Island."

Poldhu thought: "Has he guessed? He's taking it too well. He's bluffing, I believe." Narrowly they watched each other, these two who lusted each for the other's blood. Judith, watching them, was aware of the strained atmosphere. Instinctively she feared the tall Cornishman, whose half-shut eyes strayed ever and again to her own. Traquair was talking. He was telling Poldhu of the finding of the *Nancy Q*.

"And where's Carver?"

"He's gone to Waihiti," said Traquair easily, with a look that intimated he had done nothing of the kind. "He and McGinty and Kukeko—a blackguard that sailed with me once. Porter came along in the *Penguin* and took 'em off. This is Nicode's daughter, Judith."

He plunged into explanations, but Poldhu paid little heed. Nicode's daughter, eh? And where had Nicode got a daughter like that? Hell, but she was lovely! By the way, where was Nicode?

"Nicode?" echoed Traquair as Poldhu demanded his whereabouts. "He's on Flanders Island."

"Why?"

"Why not?" said the other truculently. "He stayed—with Lefroy."

"Willingly?"

"Any reason why he shouldn't be willing?"

"None. Only people don't often stay with Lefroy from choice. You'd better come in and have some food. Miss Nicode, you're welcome to stay until Traquair takes you back to Waihiti."

There was a question in his voice, but Traquair ignored it. He followed Poldhu into the house, calling over his shoulder to Judith in an offhand way.

She went into the cool dark interior where food was waiting for them. Poldhu had taught his cook to fry chicken in American fashion. There was a great dish of this delicacy, garnished with wafer slices of pork. A catch of prawns had been baked, wrapped carefully in *ti* leaves. Taro, bananas, and rice completed the meal. The men drank whisky, and for Judith there was coffee.

POLDHU made a pretence of eating, but he was preoccupied with his guests. Traquair's attitude perturbed him. Who could tell what lay behind that smooth mask? Nicode—where was he and what was he doing on Flanders Island? And Nicode's daughter—this girl with hair like flames and blue eyes where the devil lurked—where did she fit into the puzzle? He tried to make her talk, but she spoke little. Piqued, he set himself to draw her out. He was anxious to know how the land lay between her and Traquair. Impossible, of course, that Traquair had not made love to her. But she seemed as cold as ice. To his experienced eye she was untouched. Perhaps she would respond as the days went by. How long Traquair intended to stay was doubtful.

"You had a bad time on the *Nancy Q* then?" said Poldhu.

Judith's eyes dropped.

"Yes."

"Any hope that she can be salvaged?"

"No."

Conversation proved difficult, but he persisted. He liked to hear the boyish voice, though it answered him in monosyllables. Ever and again he glanced at Traquair, searching for any sign of jealousy that would tell him what he wanted to know. But Traquair ate imperturbably, nor did he appear to listen when Judith spoke. The boys came in and out with dishes. The wind had dropped at midday and the stifling heat invaded even the darkened room.

"There's an empty room upstairs," said Poldhu suddenly. "It's really a loft, and it's hardly ever used. Puka shall clean it out and make up a bed for you there."

"Thank you," said Judith lifelessly. She got up from the table and went to the door. No one was abroad in this hottest hour of the day. Somewhere a dog barked languidly. A kingfisher went by in a streak of blue. He disappeared among the dim green vista of the palms. Slowly she followed him, away from that house, away from the tense, strained atmosphere that must surely break in a storm at last.

When she had gone Poldhu lit his pipe and stared thoughtfully at Traquair.

"Now suppose you tell me what happened to Nicode and the others."

"I've told you."

"You've repeated the yarn you made up for that girl's benefit. Where's Nicode?"

"Flanders Island."

Poldhu leant forward.

"Alive?"

"Damn your eyes, of course he's alive. Do you think I make a hobby of—of——"

"Murder? No. Is he going to stay long?"

"How the hell do I know? We had a row and he didn't come back with me. What's the idea, being so interested in him?"

"I'm not interested. I hope he'll stay on Flanders Island. His sort isn't dependable. Well, where's Carver?"

"Gone down to Davy Jones, I hope. I took 'em off the *Nancy Q*, four of 'em, but only Judith came aboard. The rest stayed in the longboat."

"Choice?"

"It was either that or swim. There wasn't any room for Carver on the *Amaranth*."

Poldhu thought: "That's the truth,

about Carver. But he's lying about Nicode."

Aloud he said, "What do you think of Judith?"

"Fine girl," returned Traquair non-committally. "But not my style. Too young and too boyish."

He stretched himself and yawned. Suddenly, with his arms still in the air he said, "What tobacco are you smoking?"

"Pine's Capstan."

"Sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. Why?"

"Thought I smelt another kind."

"What do you mean?"

Traquair got up.

"I suppose Nicode didn't leave any when he was here?"

"No."

"Funny. I could have sworn I smelt the stuff he used to smoke. He gets it from old Horton over at Degas. I'd know it anywhere."

Poldhu looked at him strangely. He was walking restlessly up and down the room, his hands thrust into his pockets, his teeth clenched on the stem of his pipe. He went to the door, paused irresolutely, and came back to the disordered table. The whisky bottle was half empty. He caught it up and poured himself a stiff drink. As he put the glass down his troubled eyes met those of Poldhu watching him intently.

"What are you staring at me like that for?"

"I'm not staring at you. Your nerves are on edge. Touch of sun, perhaps."

"Perhaps," agreed Traquair. He went out and paced up and down before the house. Presently he caught a glimpse of Judith's dress among the trees. He turned his steps towards the palm grove. She was sitting quite still on a fallen trunk. When Traquair came near she did not raise her eyes. In her hands she held some yellow hibiscus flowers which she wove idly into a wreath.

"Judith."

"Well?"

"I want to explain how things are. We may have to stay here some time. You see—I—there's something on hand that I want to finish. Just business, that's all. It wouldn't interest you. Now, there's Poldhu. He's—well, he's a devil. That's why you've not got to be surprised if I take no notice of you. If he thought I cared about you—well, can you guess exactly what he'd be likely to do? If I pretend I don't care, he'll not be so interested as he would be if he knew that I loved you. I won't let him hurt you. God, I'll let daylight into him the first time he lays a hand on you! When my business is finished, we'll go away wherever you like."

He was on his knees beside her, kissing her hands. Her beauty, her nearness went to his head like wine. For one wild moment he was tempted to snatch her in his arms and carry her aboard the *Amaranth*. Why not leave this fatal island of Parawa, and seek once more the open sea? Could he not find in this slim girl the anodyne for the fevers that burnt him? He closed his eyes and straightway there rose before him the figure of the Dreaming God, and behind it stood Poldhu. The impulse passed. Not for any woman born would he give up the thing he had come to Parawa to do.

THE day burned itself out. After a silent meal Judith went up the wooden stairs to the room that had been prepared for her. She shot the bolt and set down the lamp on a chair. The window was open and she leaned out, breathing deeply the scented air of the Pacific night. Among the bushes the fireflies danced. On the beach some girls were crooning a love song. Dimly she could make out naked bodies stretched lazily by a fire that leapt higher as a handful of brushwood was thrown among the flames. She felt an odd throb of pity for the evanescence of all this beauty of the South. It was too intense, too overpowered by its own sensuous vitality to endure as the cold loveliness of the North endures. Nothing lasted in these coral seas—except the things that never die, pain and despair and loneliness. How would it all end? She asked herself the question as she closed the shutters. On the floor stood a bowl of water. She plunged her hands into it, rinsing them again and again till they were clean of the kisses of Traquair's hot lips. Her mind fled to Carver. If he lived, there was the chance that he might come in time. Strange to remember that they had once been enemies! He would never give up his pursuit of Traquair. Then he must come to Parawa where Traquair was.

Slowly she took off her clothes and lay down on the bed that Puka had arranged for her. Why should her pulses beat so fast at thought of Carver? Was it because she could still feel his hand above her heart?

Very late that night, Traquair made some excuse and went outdoors. He went down to the shore and put off to the *Amaranth* alone, in a dingey which Poldhu kept beached for casual occasions. When he returned he brought with him what he had locked in the farther cabin. It was a woman. When they landed Traquair motioned her to follow him. They went to a disused hut that stood well back among the palms. He flung open the door and she went in. Earlier in the day he had brought a lamp and this he now lit and placed on the earthen floor. Food and water had been fetched in readiness. For a moment he stood looking at her as she waited his pleasure. She was tall and well formed, a Marquesan of a very handsome type. In a low voice he began to speak to her, and she listened, nodding her head every time he paused. When she understood what she had to do she shrugged her brown shoulders.

"Savvy, Tarakawa."

He left her, closing the door carefully behind him, and went back to the house. He had waited till a late hour before carrying out his plans for two reasons; first, that Judith should not know, and next, that Poldhu should. And Poldhu had guessed just as much as Traquair desired. He retired to bed well pleased with his night's work.

As he pulled off his shirt he paused, sniffing the air.

That curious scent of tobacco, the tobacco Nicode used to smoke . . . .

II

DARCY said he didn't want to sell the *Kestrel*. Then he hummed a bit, and spoke vaguely of an offer from Manners over at Degas. When Carver pointed out that Manners had just bought the *Mary Grey* from Henry Jones' widow, Darcy smiled at him as one smiles at a smart child. He said he was thinking of starting after pearls that year. His slack mouth and shifty eyes told Carver that this was a game where infinite patience would win. It would take time. Time! Every minute was precious, every hour spent on Lafayette was an hour lost. This fool Darcy with his lies and his pretence—bah! The fellow wanted his head smashed. With an effort Carver swallowed his rising temper and renewed the attack. By the third day he realized that his eagerness was defeating his own ends. Darcy was dangling him on a bit of string and watching him with enormous amusement.

He changed his tactics. Meeting Darcy in the early morning he asked to be taken over the *Kestrel*. Darcy agreed. They rowed out and went aboard. The *Kestrel* was a smart cutter. Her lines would gladden the heart of any seaman. She was in splendid condition and she had the advantage of auxiliary power, no slight boon in those treacherous seas where the dread of calms is ever present. Darcy did the honors with pride. He shouted to his Kanakas and they flung out the sails, main and topsails, foresail, jib, and jib-topsail. Darcy chanted a saga in praise of the engine. But Carver remained unmoved.

"I don't know that I'm so keen," he said after a time. "I'd sooner have a sloop any day. I don't like a reeving bowsprit. Give me a fixed one every time. And look at that gaff. If that stands out the next storm I'll be surprised. Seems to me she'd be a heavy boat in a breeze. Oh, isn't she? I see those reef-bands have been mended a good few times. Oh, she'd need a lot of money to get her in trim. Much more than I can afford. Besides, I'm acting for McGinty as well. I don't suppose he'd care about that donkey-engine. Struck me that topsail worked very stiffly. Oh, is that so? Well, I'm not so keen as I was. I think I'll go on with Andrews as far as Degas. I hear Smithers wants to part with his sloop. Yes, I fancy a sloop. Very small cuddy this boat's got, hasn't she?"

After half an hour of continual fault-finding he had Darcy gibbering with suppressed rage. He listened patiently and when Darcy had talked himself out, he announced again his intention of making a bid for Smithers' sloop.

They returned to shore in silence. During the rest of the morning Darcy wore a strained air. In the afternoon he strolled into Preedy's bar, where Carver sat reading a month-old paper. Carver greeted him cordially and plunged at once into a discussion on the copra prospects for the season. So interested did he seem in the subject that Darcy failed to make any impression when he tried once or twice to bring the conversation round to the buying and selling of boats. Carver dismissed the subject with a wave of his hand and droned on about native labor and the scandal of a grandmotherly government's interference with profits. In despair Darcy drank up and went out.

Before night he was back again. He found it difficult to bring Carver to the point.

"I've told you I don't want her," protested the latter. "After what I saw of her this morning I wouldn't have her as a gift. She's old and she's rocky. Now, about that copra I was speaking of this morning——"

It ended by Darcy taking off fifty dollars from the price he had fixed in his mind and offering the *Kestrel* as one who prays that a boon may be conferred. With the air of a benefactor Carver took out his wad of bills. Darcy's greedy fingers closed on the rustling paper, and Carver stood up, master of the *Kestrel*.

He wasted no time. Straightway he went on board, and lined up the crew, warning them of the change of ownership. When he had finished he tossed them some sticks of tobacco, and watched them scramble like children for the coveted stuff. When they had seized their booty they retired to the cuddy. Carver could hear them whispering. After a few minutes they sidled out, grinning. A shock-headed Degas boy was the spokesman.

"Kanakas say keep here all along Kahiva. Kahiva heap good man, heap much better Darsi. Darsi beat, beat, all the time."

Carver had a swift picture of that ferret-faced chap throwing his weight about with a whip. Yes, his sort wouldn't know how to handle a crew. The boys sang as they heaved at the anchor. Darcy, coming out to see the last of the *Kestrel*, caught the faint echo above the roar of the waves on the reef. He stood watching moodily as the boat turned her head towards the open sea. There was a stiff breeze and the white horses shook their manes as they galloped through the tumbling waters. For an instant Darcy regretted that he had parted with the cutter. Then his fingers touched the wad of notes that bulged slightly under his shirt. He shrugged his shoulders and went back to Preedy's. Perhaps he hadn't been such a fool after all. He had got a good price, enough to start him in partnership in Hudson's copra plantation. Island life was much safer. Too many storms and squalls in these perishing seas. You took your life in your hand when you left harbor. Oh, yes, he'd done the sensible thing. He took the double that Preedy had poured out for him. With the glass in his hand he went to the door and gazed out to sea. The *Kestrel* was well away, swaying under the breeze. The sun shone full on her white sails.

For a long time Darcy stood there, his drink untouched, watching until she was out of sight.

BY GOOD luck the wind held steadily. The *Kestrel* was built for speed, as Carver discovered in his impatience. Dim islands slid by in a haze of green, as the ship cut through the blue sea towards the blue horizon. They passed a Spaniard, the *San José*, beating westward, and exchanged friendly and incomprehensible shouts as they went by. Just south of Papalauta they found a dingey upturned, floating aimlessly. They hauled it aboard and made out the name *Barbara*. Stuffed into a crevice was a bit of newspaper, creased and sodden, that bore a date eight months old. At any other time Carver's mind would have been captured by this tragedy of the sea. But for him there was nothing save his goal. On the third day out from Lafayette they sighted Waihiti, dreaming in the blue of noontide to the lullaby of the breakers. A thought stabbed Carver's mind: "Is this the last time I shall see it? What's waiting for us all in the south?" Yet he knew that nothing would turn him from his desire, that for him there was no rest until he felt Traquair's throat under his hands.

McGinty came down to the water's edge to meet him. He looked older, but the fever had had little effect on an iron constitution. Besides, Hogan had nursed him and coddled him as if he were a sick duck.

"You've got her, then."

"Yes," said Carver, as he helped the boys drag the dingey up the beach. "And a hell of a job I had, too. You all right?"

"Yes. If Hogan had been a woman, he'd have been a nurse. I ain't never had such care took of me since I wore short pants.

Got a full crew, eh?" McGinty asked.

"Aye. See here, Kukeke ships with us this trip. He'll be useful if we have to make that south opening in Parawa. He's been through. There's a hidden lagoon in the middle. Blamed if I know how we'll get in."

"You'd get into hell if you set your mind on it," said McGinty with conviction. "Don't tell me a little thing like reefs or a bit of solid rock is goin' to stop you. Which shall you make for first, Judith or the Dreaming God?"

"Neither. They'll come afterwards."

"You mean——"

"I mean Traquair," said Carver, passionately. "He's going to pay me this time. And before I kill him I'll choke out of him what he's done with the God of Fuchow."

He strode away to the store and McGinty followed him slowly up the beach. Hogan came down to meet them. He cast an appraising eye at the *Kestrel* where she rocked at her moorings.

"Damn fine boat," he said. "Did Darcy put up his price?"

"He fetched it down again," Carver told him grimly. "Hogan how soon can you get stores aboard?"

"Goin' right away?"

"Before night. Kukeke anywhere around?"

He went away to look for the Kanaka. McGinty turned to Hogan.

"He's set on it," he said. "We better look slippy about them stores. Got any of the canned tomatoes same as we had last time?"

They went inside, and Hogan began to clear a space on the counter. At the door McGinty turned and stood looking across the lagoon. A Kanaka was setting fish traps. His body shone like copper under the burnishing sun. The jade water shimmered in a noontide haze.

"It's kind of peaceful, ain't it?" said Hogan over his shoulder. "Mop it up while you can, McGinty."

"He's set on goin'."

"Then you'll not turn him. You can turn a man from a woman, and you can turn him from gold. But there's a thing that you can't turn him from, and that's hate. That's what's drawin' him south. He'd go right through hell to get Traquair . . . No, I shouldn't take that pork and beans. Try this kind. Oh, yes, bit dearer, but still . . . ."

CHAPTER XIII

SUSPENSE

ON PARAWA the days were long. From dawn till starlight the three white people on the island walked in hidden distrust of each other. But it was on Judith that the heaviest strain fell. Day by day she saw the patience lessen in Traquair's eyes. He spoke little to her, but he watched every movement. Each hour tightened the threads. Inevitably they must break. She wondered if it would be any use to make an appeal to Poldhu. For a whole day she contemplated this, making up little speeches that should touch him, urging him to protect her from Traquair. All day she pondered, weighing her words and polishing her phrases. Till dusk she stayed on the shore, and then went into the house, her courage high with resolution. As she entered the unlit room someone loomed up beside her in the darkness. It was Poldhu. He caught her in his arms and lifted her off her feet. She felt his lips on her mouth and her throat. With the fierce panic of a trapped animal she fought him with her small hard fists. She might as well have beaten him with silken thread. He cared nothing for her blows, nor did he release her until he chose. Then he set her down, and stood still while she fled from him through the dark room to the wooden stairs. From beginning to end no word had been spoken. She flung herself down by her low bed and crouched there, trembling with angry fear. This was Poldhu, then, who had not turned his head to look at her since the night she first came. Her courage fled down the wind and the mocking echoes of its footsteps mingled with the furious beating of her heart.

She crouched there dry-eyed, shivering in the warm darkness. To whom could she turn for help? Nicode was dead and Carver was God knew where. It seemed inevitable that she must choose between those two men downstairs. Traquair had come in and she heard his voice through the thin boards. If she told him what had happened he would fight Poldhu. They would go back to primitive men, fighting for the woman they both desired, and the victor would come smiling to claim her, stretching out stained hands towards her beauty.

Footsteps sounded below, and native voices drifted up. The boys were bringing in supper. The smell of cooked fish rose to her nostrils, but hunger was dead in her. She could not go down and face those watching eyes. She heard Traquair's voice calling her, but her tongue refused to answer. Presently he stopped and the clatter of knives and plates began.

"Where's Judith?" said Traquair, when she did not appear. Poldhu looked up.

"She came in about an hour ago and went upstairs. Guess she's not well. Oh, let her alone. She'll be all right by tomorrow. No, she didn't speak to me."

The meal progressed in silence. Outside, the cicadas were singing their drowsy song. A yellow moon rose out of the sea and climbed above the cliffs until its beams whitened the floor outside the circle of lamplight. The two men sat with their faces in shadow. They were wary of each other in these days. Each waited for the other to make the first move in this slow, deadly game which must end with checkmate for one of them. Poldhu was impassive, motionless. But Traquair's fingers had closed on a pawn that he pushed slowly across the board.

"Moon's bright," said Poldhu.

Traquair nodded.

"Light enough to find your way half across Parawa," pursued Poldhu.

"What are you getting at?"

"Nothing. What is it to me if you go out every night?"

"Go out—?"

"Do you think I don't know? It's the girl you brought here in the *Amaranth*. I caught a glimpse of her this evening."

Traquair frowned sulkily. "Don't you go making eyes at her, that's all," he said. "I'll have no one messing around with my property."

"Course not," the other soothed him. "Handsome bit of goods, eh?"

"Marquesan."

"They surely are a handsome lot. What is she—seventeen?"

"Just about," said Traquair somberly. "Keep off her, Poldhu. She's got the devil's own temper."

"Is that so?" said Poldhu with interest. "Does Judith know about her?"

"Can't say. Doesn't matter anyway. Judith's nothing to me."

"No? But this other——"

"Oh, drop it," said Traquair angrily. "Don't meddle with my business. What's it got to do with you? I tell you Luani would as soon knife you as look at you. She's a little hell-cat—and until she's mastered—well, I'll be the one to do it."

"Luani? Sounds like someone sighing. All right, I'm not worrying. Pass the bottle."

They fell into silence. Poldhu's mind returned to the conversation. So that was where Traquair disappeared to! A feeling almost of resentment rose in Poldhu's mind. With a woman like Judith near him, how could a man waste his time wooing a native girl? She must be very beautiful. He knew Traquair for a good judge. That evening, passing by twenty yards from the hut where Luani lived, he had caught a tantalizing glimpse of a pair of soft eyes. And so she was a little devil, was she, until someone mastered her? He would like to see the woman he could not conquer. He could tell that Judith was not going to be easy. It was a bit risky too, with Traquair in the offing. Luani . . . In ten years Judith would be slightly more beautiful than she was now. But the Kanaka girl would be old and shapeless long before she was thirty.

Suddenly an intolerable restlessness seized him. His mind was surfeited with the menace of Traquair, and the thought of Judith's beauty. Luani. . . . Luani!

Traquair, watching, guessed very well at the thoughts which passed through the other man's mind. A fierce exultation seized him. It was working out as he had planned. He would spoil it by no further word. There would be no trouble over Judith once Poldhu's attention was drawn elsewhere. Presently Poldhu knocked out his pipe and sat down at the table.

"When are you going back to Flanders Island?"

Traquair stared.

"Why should I go back?"

"Well, Nicode's there. I suppose you haven't quarreled with him for good. Or is he going to find his way back to Waihiti by himself?"

"You're always harping on Nicode," said Traquair angrily.

He rose, knocking over his chair impatiently, and went to the door. The scented night greeted him, waking old thoughts, old desires. There had been a golden moon like this on a night in Honolulu . . . And on a night in Amanu. He looked up at Judith's window.

"Are you going out?" said Poldhu.

"Yes."

He walked down the path that led to the beach road. The night wind was singing in the palm trees, swaying their branches to its careless lilt. It was late and no one moved in the village. He turned from the road to a little path that ended at the lonely hut where he had placed Luani. The door stood open and a thread of light pierced the darkness. He went in and she rose to greet him.

Up at the house Poldhu sat thinking. With his mind he followed Traquair down the path and along the road above the silver lagoon, till he reached the door.

It would have been well for him if he had followed Traquair with his body and seen those two silent figures in the hut. But he did not. So he could not know that Traquair sat motionless on an upturned box, smoking furiously, thinking—with his mind half a mile away from the woman who crouched at the other side of the hut, watching him patiently, impassively.

NEXT day Traquair rose very late. He refused food and mooned about the house. Poldhu regarded him curiously.

"Feel bad?"

"Touch of sun. It's nothing. How long before we lie up for the *Sultan?*"

"She's due on the 8th of August. Plenty of time yet. Next week we'll go up and test the light. You're looking queer. Why don't you shove some cold presses on your head?"

The day went on. Judith stole in like a pale ghost and ate her food without a word. All day she hung about near the house, afraid to go far among the palms lest Traquair follow her, afraid to go into the house lest Poldhu should be there—alone.

But Traquair had no intention of following her. He drooped until noon and then shouted for Tali to make cold presses. At three he retired to his own room and lay down, groaning at intervals. At dusk Poldhu opened the door and looked in to find him breathing heavily, with closed eyes. Even the jingle of dishes and knives in the next room failed to rouse him when suppertime came. Poldhu and Judith faced each other across the table and ate in silence. In answer to her inquiry he told her curtly that Traquair had a touch of sun. He'd be all right in the morning. Better leave him alone to get over it. Supper over she went upstairs, and he heard the turn of the key in her lock.

Cautiously he rose and opened Traquair's door. The room where Judith slept was the only one not on the ground floor. Satisfied that the man was asleep, Poldhu closed the door again softly. He turned down the lamp and went out. His padding footsteps sounded faintly on the path. Traquair, sitting up in bed, heard them. Into his eyes crept satisfaction. He got up and went into the living room, where he found food and ate it hungrily. His forehead was still damp from those beastly wet cloths. He moved about the house aimlessly for a time, and later he went back to his own room and lay thinking in the darkness until he fell asleep.

Poldhu found his way to the hut among the palms. A lamp burned dimly inside. He paused at the door. It was closed. He tried it and found it locked. A voice questioned him inside. It was soft, sweet; it was young and there was laughter in it.

Poldhu answered, standing by that door. His voice, too, took on a timbre of unaccustomed softness. Words came in answer from inside; and as he made further plea, there came, at length, laughter . . . mocking laughter.

The door was not opened that night, and Poldhu returned to the house through the palms with baffled fury in his breast. Yet the very softness of that mocking laughter echoed in his ears, alluring, young and sweet. It was necessary to proceed slowly. Traquair . . . Judith . . . damn Judith!

And Traquair, up at the house, turned in his sleep, his lips still curved in a satisfied, ironic smile.

II

TRAQUAIR knew that soon he must leave Parawa with Judith. There remained but one thing to be done before they left the hidden lagoon forever. He would not go until he could take the

Dreaming God with him. Then he must find it. Poldhu must be off his guard by now. Where had he hidden it? When a man has a thing hidden he is never content to let it lie. He must be forever touching it, looking to see if it is still there. There were many secrets which Parawa held. But to this one he had no key. He would have to watch every movement that Poldhu made. Judith must help. She had sharp eyes. On an impulse he spoke to her in the house when he found her alone.

"Judith."

She raised her blue eyes to his. What he saw there chilled him. Had she changed? He had warned her to appear indifferent to him. What if it were real? He choked back the supposition. But it left his mind oddly disturbed.

"Judith, we must get away. The business I told you about is finished. But before we go, we must get the Dreaming God. You know about it. Poldhu's got it here, somewhere, hidden. I must know where. You've got to help me. We must watch him."

Watch him! What else had all of them done but watch each other since the first day the *Amaranth* came into harbor? Traquair was speaking quickly, but she hardly heard him. Presently he moved away and left her among the frangipani bushes. Her mind was puzzled. What business was this of which Traquair spoke? Her eyes turned to the opening which led from the lagoon to the open sea where the brave waves rolled and tossed. Here everything was still and smooth and sinister. Her heart felt sick at the suspense. What was waiting for them all in the hours to come? Her sensitive mind felt the imminence of catastrophe. Which of them would bring it about?

She saw Poldhu come up from the beach. He had been on board his own boat, the *Wolf*. He carried with him a coil of wire, a hammer, and a bag that looked as if it might contain nails. He spoke to Traquair and together they went through the palm grove towards the stony path that led up and up till it reached the top of the cuplike ridge that hid the lagoon from the outer world.

Poldhu tramped ahead. In his hand he carried the things he had brought from the *Wolf*. They were going to see if the decoy light was in order. The 8th of August was near. Even now the doomed *Sultan* must be on her way north. Up and up they climbed till the sweat ran down into their eyes, and their clothes hung to their bodies in a wet limp tangle of stickiness. The palm trees grew more sparsely and the wind blew with increasing force as they neared the top. Here were great piles of huge stones, oddly marked with lichens. Out of sight of the sea stood a rough wooden hut sheltered by a cairn of stones. Poldhu opened the door and they went in.

Here stood the decoy light. It consisted of a tall glass dome that had an opening at one side. Inside it stood an iron container filled with oil. There were eight large wicks, each of which could be lowered or heightened separately. Outside, on a rise that overlooked the sea, a little wooden platform had been built to receive the light. The Port Edward Island light, which it was designed to imitate, was one that showed for thirty seconds at a time with a half minute's duration between every two flashes. With the decoy light this meant that Poldhu must keep guard with his watch in his hand to insure absolute exactness. Two Kanakas must stand by with a heavy tarpaulin which they drew before the light at the motion of Poldhu's hand, thus giving to a passing ship the illusion of the revolving light of Port Edward Island. Poldhu rarely attempted a wreck alone. After an hour the strain of counting seconds became unbearable. He and Traquair or he and Morton relieved each other, changing the Kanakas at the same time.

Poldhu inspected the wicks, turning them up and down to test them. There was hardly enough oil in the container. They must fetch some from the village. One of the wicks was a little frayed. Well, Morton would return with new ones very soon. But not yet. He had made a plan with Morton in case Traquair should return from Flanders Island. Morton was not to return till a beacon was lit on Parawa. This was to be a sign that Traquair had gone away, either to Waihiti or to another place from which he would not come back. After the 8th, reflected Poldhu, he would be able to light the bonfire, in all probability. Salvaging a wrecked ship is a risky job. Accidents innumerable happened. One might happen to Traquair.

"Well?" Traquair's voice cut across his

thoughts. "What do you say about fetching up the oil tomorrow? Looks all right otherwise."

He walked to the platform and tested it. A board was loose. He went to the canvas bag that lay in the hut and took out a handful of nails. The noise of hammering rent the air. He tested the platform again, springing on it heavily. It showed no sign of strain and he was satisfied. Poldhu was walking down the path, the canvas bag in his hand. Traquair dropped the remaining nails into his pocket and forgot them. The sun was high and they walked slowly. Poldhu was humming a fragment of song. His tall, strong body moved easily among the tangled undergrowth. His great hands caught now and again at the fronds of the tree ferns that grew by the path. A kingfisher flew out suddenly, startling them.

They reached the house and called for Tali.

"You make Kai-Kai all same quick," Poldhu told him.

The boy bustled away, and Traquair flung himself on a chair that creaked under his weight. Poldhu had gone to the oil tank that stood securely padlocked behind the house. Through the slats of the crazy blind Traquair followed him with his eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BEACON

THE *Kestrel* was almost in sight of Parawa. McGinty advised laying off until they were sure of their bearings, but Carver was all impatience to make an attempt at entering. They argued it out until they were hot.

"I've got to know whether he's gone back. Where he is, Judith and the Dreaming God will be. Do you think I'm going to hang about here for days? I tell you every minute's precious."

"You're a fool, my boy, that's what you are," retorted McGinty. "I suppose you'd go steamin' smack into harbor and stand by with Traquair takin' pot-shots at you from the shore. Not for me, thanks all the same. No, what we must do is get as close in as we can by night. I don't reckon it's any good our chancin' that south entry. Oh, I know Kukeke says he knows the way. Well, Kukeke ain't no favorite of mine. He's a Kanaka, and I've never struck one yet that could tell the truth more than once a day. If you believe everything that bloomin' liar tells you, you'll believe a lot."

He spread out a tattered chart and planted his horny thumb firmly on Parawa.

"See this? Reefs all round. But there's a place just here to the northwest of the island, where there's a sort of channel."

"What's the good of that? The rocks rise right up. You can't anchor there and you can't land there. Very well, what's the——"

"Wait. The *Kestrel* can't stand any closer in than the outermost reef. But the longboat could get in."

Carver studied the chart intently. It was as McGinty had said. The reefs were too numerous to allow the *Kestrel* to get nearer than a mile and a half from Parawa. But a small boat stood a chance. There was a channel to the northwest deep enough to take the longboat without danger. The race of the tide would make the undertaking extremely dangerous. Landing would probably be difficult, as the cliffs apparently rose steeply from the sea. McGinty ran his fingers through his scanty hair.

"Hard as hell," he said at last. "You might get in or you mightn't. But seems to me there's no other way, short of smashin' the *Kestrel's* bottom by tryin' the south openin'. Anyway, you might try. And if you could get ashore, you could take a look round. If he's there, and you're set on it, we'll make the south entry. If he's not, well, there'll maybe come a chance of findin' him somewhere else."

"It would be better if we could lay in. This channel's deep enough to take the *Kestrel* right in under the cliffs. It's only a question of anchorage."

McGinty's great fist came smashing down on the chart.

"No!" he roared. "We'd be broke to bits. The least snap of wind, and we'd be havin' tea down with Davy. Damn your eyes, ain't you got no sense? We're not takin' the *Kestrel* in any closer than the outside reef. We'll get there just before dawn. Kukeke and you can chance your lives in the longboat. I'll come back next day and take you off again, if so be as you're still alive."

So they arranged it. Just before the red dawn the *Kestrel* crept down from the north, feeling her way with the utmost caution. It was a still morning. There was an oily swell on the graying sea, but no wind. The longboat was ready. They had fixed tarpaulins skilfully so that Kukeke and Carver would have to waste no time in bailing should the sea become rough. The tarpaulins had been arranged so that the boat looked like an Eskimo kayak, covered but for two places left for the bodies of the rowers. Parawa showed black against the paling sky as they put off. The *Kestrel* did not wait. McGinty put her about under auxiliary power and hurried off. It would not be wise to hang round the island in case Traquair had set watchers.

Carver and Kukeke bent to their oars. The tide was very strong. It tore past the island in a smooth swell. Before they had rowed half a mile, the sweat was pouring into their eyes. They could see where the reefs lay by the cressets of foam that broke the sliding water. On and on they went, till their muscles were in torment. But they dared not stop. The narrow channel ran straight. On either side the hidden reefs waited. It took every atom of their strength to keep a straight course. At the least chance the longboat would be swept by the current onto the reefs. Right ahead was a spit of sand. They strained every nerve to reach it, toiling with bent heads and drawn, stubborn faces. Their breath grew labored. Nearer and nearer they drew to the desired landing. Kukeke's oar slipped and instantly the boat swirled round. Carver fought like a maniac to right it and wrenched it straight again by an effort that left him spent and gasping.

At last the green water spat them out onto the land. With the remnants of their strength they dragged the boat up the narrow beach under a ledge of rock. Then they flung themselves down, with long sobbing breaths that shook them from head to foot. For nearly an hour they stayed there, until the violent beating of their hearts slowed to normal and their quivering limbs grew steady.

The cliff rose steeply, sheer above their heads. But it was quite practicable to climb. Carver's quick eye leapt from point to point, picking out the zigzag course which would be easiest. He flung back his thick, black hair and squared his shoulders. Warily then he began to climb.

Kukeke, standing there open-mouthed, watched him as he swung from rock to rock. Here his hand grasped a narrow ledge. Here he seized a sapling that swayed dangerously under his grasp. The mounting figure went higher and higher, till Kukeke's neck ached, and he jerked his head forward to relieve the strain. When he looked up again Carver had disappeared. Kukeke sat down resignedly to watch the rolling sea until Kahiva should choose to return.

Carver stood on the top of the cliff. All round him was rough, stony ground covered sparsely with coarse grass. A few battered palms raised their heads. He strode on, keeping a sharp lookout. But caution was needless as yet. He could tell that somewhere in front of him the ground fell away sharply. But he was hardly prepared for the suddenness with which it descended. A quarter of a mile from the cliff it dropped, first a wall of bare rock, then an easier slope covered thickly with bush. He threw himself flat on the edge of the rock and peered over the edge into the bottom of the cup-shaped depression.

IN THE center lay the lagoon, blue as heaven and almost as still. It was bordered by a wide beach where the catamarans of the Kanakas lay like toy boats. He could make out the village, with the native huts clustered together, and a white house, long and low, standing by itself, half hidden by the palms. The *Wolf* and the *Amaranth* lay like painted ships. As his eyes grew accustomed to the scene he could pick out figures, dark puppets that moved slowly about the beach. One of them was dragging a catamaran across a stony patch and the thin grating sound stole up through the clear air long after the boat lay still.

The sun grew hotter and the rock on which he lay scorched his hands. He rose and made his way to a place where the ground was broken and descent more easy. It was a laborious journey. He took out his knife and hacked at the tangled undergrowth. The lianas and the twisting *kui-kui* plant caught at his legs. The prickly *huava* and the long spines of the bush-holly tore his arms. Under his feet the matted creepers made a soft, treacherous carpet. He fought his way down, hoping against hope to strike a path. As far as he could he worked to the right. He must come down behind the village if possible. But he must move slowly, with infinite caution. Who could tell what sharp eyes were scanning the hillside?

Pausing a moment at a place where the trees grew thinly and he had an uninterrupted view of the beach, he saw Judith. She was walking slowly, and at the sight of her his heart missed a beat. He struck out to the right again and entered on the last phase of the perilous descent. Every step needed care. At any moment he might come on some wandering Kanaka. In vain he searched for signs of a white man. But he could not see Traquair. He was near the village now. It lay beneath him through the palms. The voices of the Kanakas, the barking of a dog, rose clearly to his ears. Where was Judith going? He must get near her, at any hazard. He must speak to her.

A sudden thought brought him up sharply. If she cared about Traquair, if she were really in league with that blackguard, it was a poor lookout. But he put the thought from him. He was lying on his belly now, creeping forward by inches. How could he make Judith hear? To shout would be fatal. To wave to her was suicidal. His only chance lay in the hope that the heat of the noonday sun might drive her in amongst the trees. For what seemed an eternity he lay prone, watching through the shade for a glimpse of a white frock. Presently he saw a man stride down the beach to the water's edge. It was not Traquair. Hogan had spoken of Poldhu. This must be he. A nasty fellow to tackle, thought Carver, noting the broad shoulders and lean thighs. Where was Traquair all this time? He hadn't had even a glimpse of him.

But he could see nothing of his enemy. For another hour he lay still among the undergrowth until a lizard crept over his foot and vanished among the sun-spattered creepers. Poldhu had gone out to the *Wolf*. The sun was high and the breeze had almost died away in this cup-shaped hollow that was the interior of Parawa. The heat became intense. When Carver looked towards the lagoon he saw it through a haze of shimmering air. At last he determined to risk going farther towards the village. Somewhere a stream was running. He could hear the babble of water plainly on the right.

He reached it at last, and plunged his hands into it. The cool water ran between his fingers and splashed his arms. He lay stretched at full length, heedless for the moment of everything but the sensuous thrill of relief to his hot skin. He drank, and washed his face, and rolled over into a sunny patch till the warm air should dry him.

It was so that Judith came on him, as she wandered listlessly among the palms. At sight of him she caught her breath. Under her foot a twig snapped. He looked up at the faint sound. Then he sprang to his feet.

"Judith."

She swayed a little.

"I thought you were dead," she said. "I didn't know till afterwards that you didn't come aboard the *Amaranth*. He—he told me. I—you—how did you——"

She paused. The beating of her heart was stifling her words, choking the half-formed thoughts that rose up inside her.

"I knew you'd come, if you were alive," she said at last.

"Where's Traquair?"

"In the house."

"Does he—I mean do you——"

He halted in confusion.

"I hate him," she told him quickly. "I think he's beginning to know that. You—you must take me away."

"Yes," he said. "Tell me now, quick as you can, how things are."

"Rotten. If you hadn't come——"

"But Traquair—I thought you loved him."

She shook her head.

"Well, who's the other man? Is that Poldhu?"

"Yes."

Suddenly she motioned him to drop to the ground.

"Get down," she said. "He's coming out of the house. He'll come to find me. To-night I'll come back."

She left him instantly and strolled away among the palms. Peering from his hiding place Carver watched the two figures meet and turn towards the house. She would come back at night. Then he must wait until dark.

"I knew you'd come if you were alive" . . . .

II

THE *Sultan* was due to pass Parawa on August 8th. All through the 6th and 7th Traquair and Poldhu were in a fever of impatience. It was difficult to say at what hour she would go by. If she sailed to time she should pass just about midnight. But so many things might conspire to hinder her. If she were overlong at Melaki, for instance, or if she were delayed by storm, all their labor would be in vain. Unless she went by at night they could not hope for any success. But Poldhu was pretty sure. For nearly a year now she had passed at night on the 8th of the month on her trading tour from Persis to Anaka, where the 'Frisco boats put in for coal. He had not dared to try her before. But she had a new skipper now, a man from New Zealand called Lang, a stranger to the Islands. He had made but one trip in her. If things panned out right, it should be an easy job. The *Sultan* was a rich prize.

Poldhu and Traquair and half a dozen boys carried up oil and lanterns, fresh ropes and some food and water. They climbed the steep hillside with frequent rests. Every ounce of energy would be needed soon. They trimmed the wicks afresh, replenished the container, and tested the tarpaulin. Since dawn a boy had been keeping watch to the south lest the *Sultan* should slip by in the daytime. Poldhu shouted anxious inquiries at him. Across his mind flashed a picture of Morton, beating up from Kahina to search anxiously for the beacon which should tell him to return. Rough luck on Morton, reflected Poldhu, rough luck to have to hang about like that. Still, it wouldn't be long now. This was the 7th. By the 9th Traquair would trouble him no longer. Nor Luani, indeed. Nor . . . Judith!

He left Traquair with the boys and came back alone. He felt queerly restless. He went down to the shore and rowed out to the *Wolf*. With meticulous care he inspected her. She it was who must finish what the decoy light began. Yes, she was all right. Two grinning Kanakas were aboard. They came running and showed him with pride how well they had cared for the ship. The lagoon was rarely troubled by storms, yet he never left the ship with no one aboard. The Kanakas had a superstition that Parawa was the home of dead sailormen, whose ghosts waited perpetually round the shore. If any ship were left unattended they would immediately take possession of her and drive her to sure destruction on the reefs outside. Poldhu was shrewd enough to respect the fear of the Kanakas.

He left the ship and went back to the island. From the boat he had seen Judith wandering along the beach, but when he returned she had disappeared among the palms. Traquair was not back yet and the house stood empty. He strode in and flung himself down on the long cane chair. God, but he was tired! This cursed heat sucked the marrow out of a man's bones. Traquair was a fool to stay up on the headland. The damn thing worked all right. If it didn't —oh, well, let it all go to blazes. He took a stiff peg and put down the empty glass with a sigh. What the hell was the matter with him lately? Even the blamed whisky was losing its taste.

He lay back and closed his eyes. His great body relaxed and his hands slipped from the arms of the chair and dangled loosely. He slept, dreaming confusedly of Morton, and Judith, and in baffled, unreal fashion of Luani. His throat was parched when he awoke.

By and by he roused himself and looked about him. Who was that knocking?

He sat up and listened. Yes, there it was, faint and distant, coming from under his feet. Under his feet! What rot. Knocking didn't come out of the ground. He looked about him, puzzled, half angry. What could it be? A boy went past the open door. He called him.

"You listen you hear tap-tap."

The Kanaka listened obediently, then he shook his head.

"Not hear," he said.

"You all same damn fool," said Poldhu irritably. "Tap-tap he come all time this way," and he beat time with his fist.

"Not hear, Polidu," persisted the boy, scared out of his wits.

An old, old fear came over Poldhu. A Cornish legend, forgotten these thirty years, returned to his mind—the legend of those Jews who crucified Christ and were sent to work in the far-off Cornish tin mines. They died there and their imprisoned spirits wander for ever along the deserted underground passages of the old mines. The knocking of their ghostly picks is heard by those who are doomed to die. They say that a Cornishman will hear it half across the world, when his time has come.

Poldhu sprang to his feet, and the boy fled, terrified at his master's face. Poldhu cursed himself for a fool. Probably it was some kid, playing with coconut shells. Or perhaps a man was mending a pot. A hundred explanations hurried into his mind. Some everyday occurrence, easily explained, easily mistaken. What else could it be? That old yarn about the knockers—bah! Catch him believing a damned lie that old women use to frighten the children! This everlasting strain of watching Traquair was destroying his nerve. That chap had something up his sleeve. He was too impassive about Judith. He had been too quiet about not finding Morton. Did he guess that the Dreaming God lay within a stone's throw? Was he plotting even then to rifle the secret hoard?

At the thought Poldhu's mouth set in an ugly line. It was impossible that Traquair should guess where it was hidden. But he was dangerous. If he ever stumbled on that room, whether by chance or cunning search, it would mean that one of them must go out. The world would not hold them both. Lust of possession drives out every other emotion. A man will stake much to win a woman. But to win the hard glittering beauty of yellow gold he will stake life itself. So Poldhu argued, judging Traquair from himself.

He got up and went to the door. Traquair was coming down the hillside. Poldhu waited until he reached the level ground and then shouted an inquiry. Traquair answered with a wave of the hand. He looked hot and tired.

"All right?"

"Yes. Where's Judith?"

"I don't know."

Traquair went off at once to look for her. Poldhu heard his voice echoing amongst the trees. Considering that the fellow swore he didn't care for her, he was a damn sight too fond of chasing after her. What about that accursed Luani? It seemed he couldn't rest unless he knew where Judith was. Had she told him that she was afraid of Poldhu? Well, after the 9th it wouldn't matter what she had told him.

There they were, both of them, coming back from the palm grove, silent, moody, walking as strangers walk. He stood in the doorway, waiting for them.

CHAPTER XV

CRISIS

IT WAS still that night. The suspense that lay upon the two men seemed to be borne on the tense night air. Poldhu observed that Traquair was restless and of small appetite when they ate, and the tiny wedge of doubt that had penetrated his mind that afternoon drove further. He watched Judith. What were these two thinking?

Was Traquair fooling him after all? There was guile enough in the man for him to pretend to be indifferent to the girl, and to plot meantime to make off with her in his own good time. Something venomous coursed through Poldhu's blood. Little enough there was between himself and Traquair. He would have to watch, to make certain that his own patient plans were not put awry.

Poldhu was gone from the house for a long interval. Where he went Traquair did not trouble to ascertain. He too watched Judith. There was a heightened color on her face tonight. It was as though the fever of expectation and of fear that possessed them had crept over her also.

"Judith," he said.

"Yes." She looked at him.

"Soon we will go. This business will not take much longer."

"No? Where will you take me?"

He smiled and rose. He came to her chair. Swiftly as he stood there a reckless disregard of his careful precautions came over him. After all, it was nearly done. Poldhu was a fool. It had been easy to blind him to the beauty of Judith. Traquair felt a rush of exultant confidence. The Dreaming God! Then Judith . . . and Poldhu be damned!

Traquair bent over her. She did not move, though she saw the light come into his eyes that drained all strength from her breast.

"Traquair!"

The voice came sharply from the doorway. Traquair turned. Poldhu stood there, eyes narrowed.

"Well?" said Traquair.

Poldhu entered. He glanced at Judith, and instantly she knew that some dreadful moment had come. Poldhu faced Traquair, and the suspense they had shared these days robbed them of their usual powers of dissimulation. Hatred passed between them without disguise. The lust to kill shone in those two pairs of eyes.

"I'm not quite the fool you've thought," said Poldhu. He spoke quietly. Yet his voice was sharp, like cold steel. Judith sensed the danger in it.

Traquair made no reply to that. He stood beside Judith as a man faces another man who would take from him his chosen mate.

"You've got something brewing, Traquair," said Poldhu. "You and your clever trap down in the palm trees! It didn't work, nor will whatever else you expect to put over on me. I'm not so easily fooled, Traquair. You'll soon see."

"No?" inquired Traquair softly, venomously. "No?"

"You've been throwing dust in my eyes here in the house too, you and Judith, haven't you? Or thinking you succeeded in doing so."

"We'll keep Judith out of this." Traquair flamed with anger. "There are other things, Poldhu. Damn you, there's been more than a little dust-throwing around here."

"For instance?"

"The God of Fuchow. What have you done with it? Where have you got it hidden? Yes, and where's Morton? Do you think I've swallowed your story about him?"

Poldhu glanced aside at Judith, and little glowing spots came over his pale cheeks in the lamplight. It was she who decided him, watching them fight before her, speaking of golden idols—and thinking of the beauty of her. One of them must die, and that one would never know her beauty. The other. . . .

Poldhu laughed. "The Dreaming God. It's here, Traquair. Yes, I've got it, and you'll never see it again. And there's nothing you can do about it, Traquair. You're licked and you'll do as I say—while you're here."

Traquair stared. Then he cursed, and Judith came to her feet and ran blindly through the door into the night, out of that room that seethed with hatred.

II

CARVER watched the sun go down behind the hill. The lagoon turned from sapphire to emerald, from emerald to amethyst. Every shadow stood out black and clear. Every slight sound came hurrying to his ears. The bush hens had gone to roost. Overhead a noisy parrot still chattered and fussed. Along the beach the Kanakas were lighting fires. He saw them chase a consumptive-looking pig which led them a fine dance before they slit its squealing throat. There was much noise and quarreling among the natives as they prepared the dead animal for roasting. One of Poldhu's boys had learned to play on a little flute, salvage from some dead ship. Quaint sad airs stole on the night wind, and the others left their pig to roast itself while they gathered round, listening intently. Presently they began to sing. Their pure voices rose in a love song that caught at the heart-strings. Carver wondered whether Judith heard it too.

What was happening in that house where a light had just showed in the lower room? He took out a couple of dry biscuits and ate them hungrily. She might not come until very late. Resignedly he stretched himself out and lay counting the stars that showed above the waving palms. He must see her before he could act. But on one thing he was determined. He would never leave the island unless he took with him the thing he had come for. When he had got it, he and Judith would make that perilous climb down to the sea where Kukeke waited patiently until his master should return. McGinty would be coming up soon, edging the *Kestrel* in as close as he dared, calling softly, listening for an answering halloo. Heaven knew what he would do when he found Carver was not there. It was to be hoped he would not be such a fool as to take Kukeke off. Carver frowned uneasily. McGinty wouldn't be mad enough as to try the opening without him, surely. But there—McGinty did queer things at times.

The sun had gone. The lagoon lay black and deep. Soon it would be silvered by the full moon. Already she was rising behind him. Her appearance it was that had caused the death of the pig to provide a feast in honor of the moon god. By and by there would be strange rites and mysteries on the beach. The echoes would drift up to him where he lay hidden. As the time passed, his impatience grew. Surely Judith would come soon.

He fancied he could hear the sound of angry voices, men's voices raised and furious. A Kanaka quarrel? No, these were white men's voices. Someone had come running out of the house, someone who tripped and stumbled and hurried on again. By the light of the rising moon he could see it was Judith, flying down the path to the shelter of the palms. He went forward to meet her, but she caught him by the hand and dragged him with her farther and farther among the trees. At last she stopped, panting, her breath coming in queer little gasps. Gently he put his arms about her to steady her and waited till she could speak.

He bent his head to catch her words. When he could make out her sobbing phrases he had a moment of horror. But he soothed her as best he could.

"He ought to be shot," he said. "The blackguard!"

At thought of what might have happened he held her close. He could feel the furious beating of her heart. A bat flew by, whirring its wings, and she hid her face in his shoulder.

"Buck up," he said. "We'll be through soon."

"Let's go," she begged him. "Take me away from this awful place. Oh, what are they doing in the house? I think Poldhu will kill him. He keeps shouting out about the Dreaming God——"

"Where is it?"

"I think it's in the house. 'It's here,' Poldhu told him. Just as I was running out I heard him say Traquair would never find it. Oh, let's leave them."

"No," he said stubbornly. "I'm not going until I get it."

"Don't go to them," she said. "Oh, please don't go into the house. They'll kill you. What is it, after all? It's only an idol. Why should you care about it?"

"Because it's mine. You're a woman. You can't understand what it means to a man to be robbed of a thing that he prizes. There's no rest for him until he gets it back. Traquair's tried to kill me twice. Next time we meet one of us is going to walk away and the other is going to lie still. And by God I'll get him."

"If I ask you—if I beg you to come away——"

"It wouldn't matter a curse what you asked me. What sort of a man do you think I am, to be turned by a girl's prayers? Hell, no! I'm seeing this through right up to the end—and beyond."

She gave it up, then, and began to sob hopelessly, bitterly, until he felt alarmed.

"Judith, it's got to be this way. If I did what you wanted and gave it all up just to make a safe getaway, I'd never respect myself again."

He felt her shuddering body close against his. The moon was up. All about them stole the perfumed night. If it was to be as Judith feared, if he should find death in that house where two men fought over the thing which was his, then let him take what he could while the blood still ran in his veins.

"Judith."

"Well?"

"You'd—be sorry—if I was the one to lie still?"

"Yes."

"But you hated me a little while ago."

There was a sudden silence. His arms tightened round her supple body. In the scented darkness he bent his head until his lips found hers. For a moment he forgot Traquair and old hatreds, and battles yet to be, in the magic of her mouth. Her white arms crept round his neck, drawing him to her, holding him yet closer. . . .

The wheels of eternity went round so swiftly that these two took no heed of their passage. It was Judith who first grew aware of clamor and shouting near the house. Something was happening down there. The Kanakas were rushing here and there in confusion. Loud cries and shouts were heard. There came a shot, and then another. How bright the windows were! There came a sound of shattering glass. Through the broken pane a tongue of flame licked the air.

WHEN Judith ran out of the house Poldhu slammed the door after her fiercely.

"Now tell me you aren't in love with her," he said. "There's more of your damned lies. I suppose while I was down making an ass of myself with that damned Luani, you and she——"

"Right there you can stop," Traquair

told him. "I haven't laid a finger on her since I brought her here. But we understood each other all right. You thought you'd play for her too, did'nt you? Oh, she and I understood each other very well. And you won't get her now. You've finished all your games. I'll see that you're finished. You'll kill no more ships."

"You blame me for the wrecks!" Poldhu cried. "Blast your soul, who helped me? Who shared in the profits? You dare to taunt me with the wrecking! You're as deep in it as I am, right up to the neck. By God, Traquair, but I'll pay you for all this! You've always been a skunk. I've known right along that one day the yellow streak would come crawling out. You killed Nicode. Yes, you did. You turned white when I said that. I wasn't sure. But I'm sure now. You're haunted. He's lying up for you somewhere. That's why you thought you smelt his tobacco the other night. That's why you sleep with a lamp burning. You're afraid he'll come out of the dark and get you."

The sweat stood on his forehead. His hands were clenched and the knuckle-bones shone white and hard.

"What have you done with the Dreaming God?" burst out Traquair. "You'll not get me scared with that fool talk about Nicode. Where is it, I say?"

Poldhu watched him intently. Traquair knew that look. It comes into a man's eyes just before he shoots. Quick as thought he stood still before Poldhu.

"I've got you covered," he said grimly. "You're a quick shot, but I'm quicker. Take your hand away from your belt."

For answer Poldhu's fist flew up and caught him on the jaw. He staggered back at the suddenness of the blow. Instantly the other was upon him. Like two wolves they went for each other's throats until Poldhu stumbled and fell, dragging Traquair with him. Like flails their arms rose and fell. In the struggle the table was overturned. The lamp crashed and a stream of oil ran over the floor. Instantly it was ablaze. The men fought on, deaf and blind to all else but their beating fists. The flames grew higher. A chair was burning. The table caught and the ceiling showed red in the growing light of the flames.

Tali heard a crash and rushed in, to retreat screaming and interrupt the feast of the moon-worshippers with cries for help. The room became a furnace. Would those writhing, twisting bodies never stop? The fire bit Traquair's ankle and he shouted with the pain. Poldhu tore himself free and stood among the ruins, rocking drunkenly. His dazed brain would not at first understand what had happened.

Fire—fire—and the thing he must save——

He turned and stumbled towards the cupboard. The door was smouldering. He spat on his hands and wrenched it open. Blindly he felt for the sliding panel. It moved under his groping hand. A bullet tore the woodwork, and another buried itself an inch from his arm. He paid no heed. Somehow he stumbled through the opening into the little room beyond, the little room whose secret was hidden from Traquair. Here stood the Dreaming God, superb, immutable. He muffled it in a bit of blanket that lay near by, and stepped back into the outer room. Through the smoke and the cruel flames he saw Traquair waiting for him. Like a bull he put his head down and charged, heedless of the singing fire. Traquair was in his path. He cannoned into him and passed on. Through the doorway he went, to the blessed air. Whooping sounds came bursting from his lungs. One thought surged through his brain, drowning all else. Escape—he must escape.

Down to the water's edge he tore, with the Kanakas behind him. A catamaran was lying on the beach. With frantic, feverish hands he stowed the burden he carried and dragged the flimsy boat to the water. A boy leapt in beside him and seized the paddle.

"You go *Wolf*, Polidu?"

"Yes. Make haste all same damn quick."

As they darted across the water under the paddle's quick strokes, Poldhu stood up in the boat and hailed the *Wolf*. An answering cry from the Kanakas aboard floated across the silent lagoon. Poldhu called to them to weigh anchor. Not a moment must be lost. He knew Traquair would follow him. Already he fancied he heard the splash of oars in the darkness.

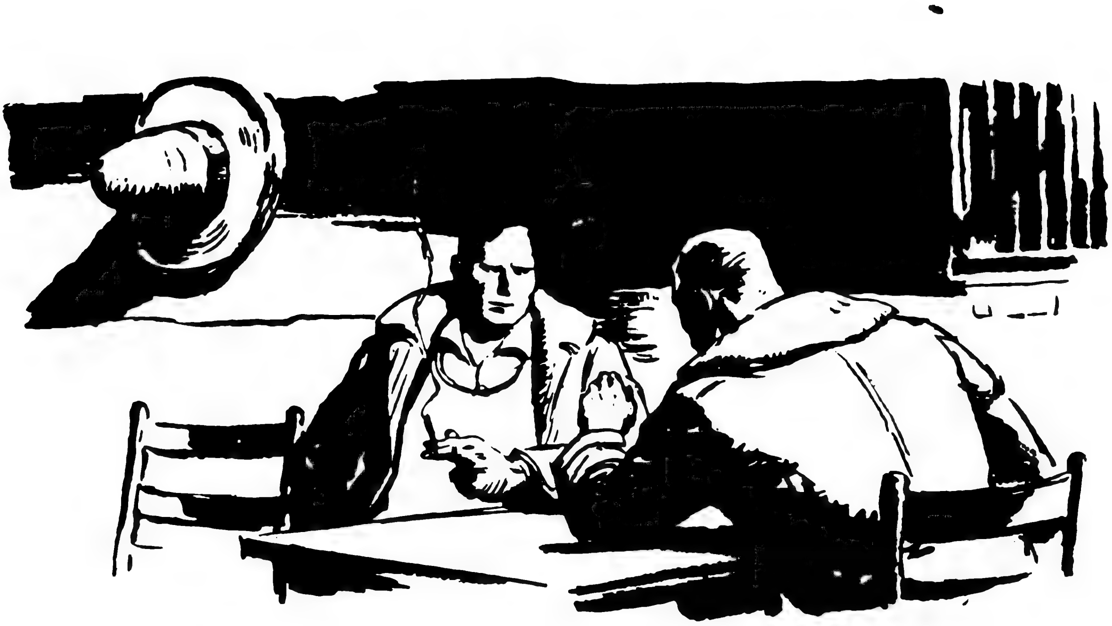
The *Wolf* loomed above the cockleshell in which he stood. He and the Kanaka boy swung themselves aboard. Luckily the night wind was fresh. Hastily he ran down the companion with the Dreaming God in his arms and stowed it away in the cabin. As he regained the deck, he felt the ship under way. Mechanically he went to the tiller. He knew every move in the game of getting a boat through the entry out to open sea. On darker nights than this he had guided the *Wolf* through the opening without scath. The dark cliffs towered above him. The smell of the outer sea came fresh and sharp. He could hear the waves beating upon Parawa.

And behind him came the pursuer. On the *Amaranth* Traquair swore at the Kanakas who were dragging at the anchor. He flung his own weight to their help. If Poldhu should get too much start, it would be useless to pursue him. The *Amaranth* had been built for speed, but the *Wolf* was swifter still. Poldhu would show no lights. No, but the moon would suffice to show Traquair that darker smear on a dark sea. Slowly the *Amaranth* swung round until her bows stood fair for the narrow opening. Traquair shouted to the boys to throw on no more canvas. There was no telling what the wind would be like outside. He didn't want to be blown on the treacherous reefs.

He had seen the thing in Poldhu's arms. He had crouched and leapt at the flying figure, only to be stretched flat by the violence of the impact. He knew very well that if Poldhu escaped him now, he would never get him again.

They gained the open sea. The waves beat more strongly against the stout timbers of the boat. Far ahead to the north the moon shone on the white sails of the *Wolf*.

In the following, and concluding, chapters, Carver comes to grips with Traquair, and the destiny of the Dreaming God is finally determined.



A Yarn of the Freelance Flyers of the Border

RIO RED

By RAOUL F. WHITFIELD

THE first time I met up with Red Bund he wasn't at all agreeable. Not at all. He wanted something that I didn't want to sell him, and he wanted that thing pretty badly. It happened over beyond Agua Prieta, across the line from Douglas. Mexico is a bad place for an argument, particularly when the other fellow sits back and handles a Colt as if he'd seen one before, during and after the late war.

"It's just this," Red stated sort of grimly, with a Mexican pill hanging from between his narrow lips as he talked, "you got a nice two-seater over at Douglas. I want her. I got coin—an' I need her. How much?"

"It's just this," I came back, "and I'm not kidding you, man. That ship's sold. It's going down the line to a guy named Junker, who's having some trouble on his ranch. Nothing doing."

Red swore. Of course, at the time I didn't know he was the gent called Rio Red. If I had known that—well, I'm only human. I might have talked less, and thought more. But he'd just come into the bar shack and eased into the chair across the small table from mine. And he wanted my ship, that was all.

"Mac—" my name wasn't Mac, but I didn't interrupt the lean, grim eyed one across from me—"you're sittin' in the wrong place to talk that way. She's a Waco, and worth around three thousand. I'll give you four. You can get another ship for Junker."

I shook my head. "Maybe," I suggested, and tried not to look at the business end of his Colt, "I can get another for you."

And right then the lean faced gent showed that he wasn't bluffing. He let two pieces of lead loose in that little room. The first ripped through my left sleeve. The second did the same, tearing khaki a few inches lower. I sat up pretty straight, but Red wasn't even blinking.

"Thirty-five hundred!" he snapped. "And if that don't suit——"

I nodded my head, and spoke just as steadily as I could. There were Mexican voices babbling in the next room. My ears hurt, and there was a little sting in my left arm. No time for argument, this.

"All right!" I agreed. "Come across and take her off."

I had some sort of a hunch that the hard eyed gent would find that tough. But I was wrong again. He just smiled cold-like, and fingered some bills with his left hand.

"I'll do that little thing," he came back. "Thirty-three—thirty-five. Right?"

It looked all right to me. I nodded my head. Red ran his left hand through a mop of bright colored hair and continued to smile.

"You was kiddin' me, at that," he said slowly. "Now, we'll walk across the line. I'll walk behind you, Mac, just in case—well, just in case. Then we'll ride out to where you got the Waco parked and I'll take her up. Fair enough."

I nodded. Red yelled for a spig, and ordered something. We were both cold sober, and we stayed that way. And we did things just the way Red had said we'd do them. There's no Rio between Agua Prieta and Douglas. Just the immigration shacks and such stuff. We walked across, and a guy in a flivver took us out to the field where I'd set the Waco down. Red knew ships. I reeved her up for him, and gave him the switch keys. He looked at the gas and oil.

"The license won't do you—" I started to say, but Red stopped me.

"Where I'm going licenses don't count much," he stated. "So long, Mac!"

Could he fly her? He sure could. He got off great, and got altitude in a series of zooms and spiral banks. It was a moonlight night, and when he leveled off at about five thousand, he headed right across the lines. I shook my head slowly. I was alone at the field. There're no border patrol ships at Douglas, no maintained field.

"Great guy!" I muttered grimly. "Got to find out who he was. The Mex should know."

First I got the scratch on my arm iodined, and then I went back to Prieta. The Mex in the bar shack didn't know much, but they knew enough. And that's how I learned that my ship-buying gent was Rio Red. It gave me a jolt, and made things a lot different. For one thing, I didn't feel so bad. Had a hunch that I'd been sort of lucky. Red had taken one or two things in his life without paying. And there was one bird who had protested too much, and had ceased to protest, for all time. Rio Red talked plain and fast, and shot the same way.

I went back past the White House Club and the International, back to the American side. There wasn't much to do about it. Red had the Waco—and I had three thousand, five hundred. So I hit the hay, and had unpleasant dreams. Mostly about Rio Red.

WHEN I woke up Al Junker was sitting on the edge of my bed and blowing the smoke from a bum cigaret in my face. He was grinning broadly.

"Figured you'd be here, Joe, so I headed this way. I'll fly the Waco back, and you can ride in the rear cockpit. How's things?"

I sat up and groaned. "Great!" I stated. "Only there isn't any Waco—not north of the Rio, anyway."

Al stiffened up. He's short and chunky, and when he narrows his gray eyes they have kind of a cold glint.

"You cracked up, landed her in Mexico?" he muttered. "How in hell did you come to——"

"Didn't," I cut in. "A friend of yours bought the ship. Under the circumstances, I sold it."

Al's eyes were fine slits by this time. He nodded his head slowly.

"Shoot, Joe!" he snapped. "Let's have it straight."

"His name," I said slowly, "is Rio Red. He picked me up across the line, and when——"

I stopped. It takes considerable to give Al Junker a shock, but I saw right away that he'd taken one this time.

"Red Bund!" he muttered. "Got the Waco, eh? Give us the rest, Joe."

So I gave him the rest. And when I finished up, Al got off the bed and started pacing up and down the thin carpet of the hotel room.

"Why in hell didn't you stay on this side, Joe?" he muttered. "Why in——"

"Why doesn't anyone stay on this side?" I cut in. "I'll get you another ship, Al. It'll only take three days. Duke's getting some in, up at El Paso. And I'm in the clear five hundred bucks."

Al laughed. It was a grim, bitter laugh. He stood close to the edge of the bed.

"If you can pass those bills he gave you, you're good!" he stated harshly.

That pulled me up out of bed. I stared at Al, then went for the bills. We looked them over together. They were crumpled, a bit soiled. I swore softly.

"Me for a bank," I stated, but Al Junker gripped me by the arm.

"It's early, Joe. And the coin doesn't matter. Red's got the ship—that does matter."

I grunted. "I'll get you another ship inside of——"

"Come out of it!" Al spoke grimly. "Red didn't want that ship for himself, Joe. Can't you get it?"

I stared at him. "Didn't want her?" I muttered. "He took her, didn't he?"

Al nodded. "To keep me from getting her," he came back. "He knew you were flying her down to me, Joe. Red knows a lot of things; learns 'em on this side of the line, and works 'em out on the other. I've got to get back to the ranch, Joe, and in a hurry. Coming?"

I nodded. Things were a bit thick, but I knew that Al would clear them up on the drive down to his ranch. That didn't bother me so much, but the thought of the bum coin did.

"I've heard about Rio Red," I stated as I climbed into my breeches and shirt. "He's a killer, eh?"

Al Junker's eyes were on the streak along the skin of my left arm. He swore softly.

"You know he is!" he stated grimly. "But he's not wanted on this side."

I nodded. That was a cinch. Red wouldn't have come across if he'd been wanted over here. And on the other side there wasn't much police organization.

"Know why I wanted that ship, Joe?" Al Junker spoke quietly, and I shook my head. Al lighted another pill. He spoke in a low, hard tone. "Two days ago one of the boys picked up Charley Cross, along the Mex line boundary of the ranch. Two bullets through his head and——"

I stiffened, swore softly. Al's voice steadied up again as he went on.

"—he'd been dead for several hours. You know how I felt, Joe. Guess you feel the same way. And it's a cinch to figure who got Charley. Rio hated him, and Charley hated Rio. Ever since I fired Red off the ranch——"

He stopped. I nodded my head slowly. Charley Cross dead; two bullets through his head. And Rio Red getting my ship over to Mexico, and burning my skin with his lead.

"What caliber bullets, Al?" I asked grimly.

"Colt—.45's," he returned. "Same gun, Joe?"

I nodded. It wasn't hard to remember Rio Red, sitting in that little room with the Colt in his right-hand grip. A .45 it had been.

"Look here, Al, there's more than one .45 in the world," I stated. "Charley was a swift talker. He had things his way. Not every man along the border loved him."

Al Junker swore. "Not many of them hated him enough to put lead in the back of his head," he returned steadily. "I'm looking for Rio Red, Joe. He figured I'd be looking for him. Got a 'dobe hut a few miles across the line from my place. Easy enough to find him, but Red knew I wasn't fool enough to come over. Not that way. He's got some bad spigs around his place. With a plane it would have been different. And he knew that too."

I nodded my head. "Plenty of guys hate each other around here," I said slowly. "But they don't go around spilling lead. There must have been something——"

Al Junker cut in, his voice hard. "There was just one witness to the killing of MacAndrews," he said quietly. "Charley Cross was the witness. Red shot MacAndrews down without giving him a chance, and put a bullet through Charley's arm, at the same time. He wasn't wanted on this side, because the authorities couldn't get evidence. Charley had his own ideas about how he'd handle Red. And Red knew that. So he got Charley—and now he's got a ship. I know plenty about the MacAndrews killing. And Red knows that, too. Let's get going, Joe."

I shook my head. "You head for the ranch, Al," I stated. "I'm going up to El Paso for another ship. You'll have her by noon tomorrow. How's that?"

Al Junker shook his head. His gray eyes had a peculiar expression in their depths.

"Go to it, Joe," he said slowly. "You're in this deal. You're out that ship. Don't try to pass that coin. Red doesn't pay for things. You'll have too much explaining to do. Take your loss and get down with another plane. You may be too late."

Al headed for the door. I swore grimly, and reached for a pill. Charley Cross had been pretty close to me a few years ago. He was a white guy; didn't rate going out the way he had. And Red had a ship. Self-protection? I didn't figure it that way. Red was up to something.

"Stay on this side of the line, Joe! If you do—" Al Junker went out through the door, but his last words drifted back —"I may see you tomorrow."

Then he was gone, and I was swearing under my breath, staring down at the crumpled bills, and thinking of the sneering, hard voiced Rio Red. But not for long. I had a long way to go, and a long way to come back. So I got into action.

THE ship distributing game isn't good enough yet to take a three thousand dollar loss and grin about it. Duke Connors, who's in partnership with me, was waiting at the El Paso field. He had a plane all tuned up and ready for the air, and he had Bill Devery with him. Devery works in a bank, and I handed over the coin. He looked it over under a good light for a long time. Then he shook his head.

"Wish I had a lot as good as that, Joe," he said slowly. "Someone's been kidding you. Duke, here, was all excited when he got your wire. Hell, that's sweet money, Joe!"

I blinked a few times. Duke swore cheerfully. I gave them both the tale, and while they were thinking things over I climbed into the front cockpit of the Waco and felt out the controls. Then I climbed down to the ground again.

"Al's sure that this Rio Red got Charley Cross. I'm not at all sure he didn't. He's the killer breed, and Charley had something on him. The coin's good, Bill says. All right. But Al Junker needs a ship. He's got two Brownings down at the ranch, and he knows how to mount 'em. Chances are he can't synchronize 'em to shoot between the prop blades. That's an expert job. That means he's got to mount 'em in the rear cockpit. Duke, how about me taking a week's vacation?"

Duke Connors smiled grimly. "Charley was a good scout," he stated. "Go to it, Joe, but don't get hurt. But how come this red-headed killer passed out good coin?"

I shook my head. "That's something I don't know," I stated slowly. "But he wanted a ship pretty badly, that's sure. Moonlight night, and I feel pretty good. Think I'll fly for the ranch right now."

Duke nodded. "Better leave the coin behind," he suggested, and I grinned and let him have it. "Luck!"

"Not enough," I stated. "Got to have more than luck, up against Rio Red."

I climbed into the front cockpit of the ship. We had two other planes in a hangar not far away. The hangar was locked up. Ed Brent was sleeping at the field, but he was in town now. Duke would wait until he came back. I fingered the automatic I was packing along, and glanced at the ship instruments. Off to the left was a sort of work shed with some bright lights inside. The door was half opened, and the light streamed out on the field. It was the sudden blocking off of the light that first attracted my attention. I jerked my head, saw Duke swing around. And then the voice sounded.

"Steady, boys—and easy! Just raise 'em up, and keep 'em up. Pedro, you slip over this way. Juan, go back near the road and watch things. Hey, you in the ship—lift 'em up!"

Rio Red! I recognized that voice, couldn't fail to recognize it. There was the peculiar throaty quality it had possessed last night. And the same, slight note of grim amusement.

I hesitated just a fraction of a second. Then I lifted my hands, and let the automatic lay on my lap. No chance of getting a shot at Red from the cramped fuselage of the plane. And there were other shapes near Red as he came forward.

It was not late, but the moon was up and there was quite a bit of light on the field. Two Mexicans came up close to Duke and Bill Devery, covered them with their guns. Rio Red walked up to the ship. I wore no helmet or goggles, and he narrowed his eyes on mine. Then he chuckled.

"If it ain't Mac again!" he breathed. "Takin' another ship down to Junker, eh?"

I shook my head. "Name isn't Mac," I said in a low tone. "Maybe you're mixing me up some with MacAndrews, Red."

It was foolish. But somehow, I couldn't help getting the crack in. Wanted to see how he'd take it.

His lean form straightened. He held his Colt waist high; now he raised it a little. I could see his lips twitch. He started to say something, then checked himself. There was a little silence. It was Rio Red who broke it, his voice low but steady.

"Ain't mixin' live men up with dead ones, Mac," he stated. "Need another ship. Not payin' for this one, not right away."

I was thinking. Not that there was very much thinking to be done. But I was trying to figure some way out. Duke was protesting.

"You can't take a ship off this field like——"

"Shut up!" Red snapped, without taking his eyes off mine, and Duke shut up. "Climb down from that cockpit, Mac."

I climbed down, letting my Colt slip to the flooring of the plane. Red beckoned me over near the spot where Duke and Bill Devery stood.

"If they make a move, shoot!" he instructed the two Mexicans. Then he climbed inside of the fuselage, started to fool with the controls.

My eyes met Duke's. The two spigs stood several yards apart, and about ten yards away from the three of us. A Mexican with a gun isn't the most dangerous guy in the world, but at ten yards he's apt to be lucky. Duke had a gun on his hip, I knew that. But Rio Red had one on his lap—I guessed that.

I shook my head, with the slightest of movements. Duke didn't figure it that way; his eyes showed me that he wanted to start something. Red broke the silence.

"Treatin' you boys pretty nice," he stated. "You won't take much of a loss on these two ships. And I need 'em. How is she for gas?"

Duke smiled grimly. "She's got enough for you to fly her back to Veschio," he muttered. "You'll face a federal firing squad for it, Red!"

The lean faced one swung a leg over the side of the fuselage, dropped to the sandy earth. His gun appeared in his right hand. He was grinning.

"You got me wrong, fellow," he said slowly. "I'm not sitting in with Fernando Veschio. I'm just playing a lone game."

I swore softly. "With two ships," I muttered.

"With two ships!" Rio agreed in a hard tone. He spoke more sharply, to the spigs who held the guns on us. "Get goin', you! I'll be all right. Get movin'!"

THEY moved toward the narrow, sandy road. Bill Devery turned his head to watch them, and Rio Red snapped at him to face around. The three of us held our hands waist high. Red grinned.

"Tell Juan to move out with you!" Red called after the two spigs. "You, Pedro, see that he gets back across——"

He broke off, his eyes meeting mine. Something seemed to amuse him. He chuckled hoarsely.

"Junker's been talkin', eh, Mac? And you've been listenin'. Makes things different. Costs money to listen. Just flew in, eh? All right, hand over that thirty-five hundred!"

I stiffened. Then I tried to fake a laugh. Rio Red's eyes were narrowed; they glinted on mine.

"Haven't got it, Red—not fool enough to——"

The Colt tilted up a bit. Red backed off a few paces toward the ship. He was smiling the nastiest smile I've ever seen on a human face.

"One of you three fold that coin up—toss it over! Don't figure wrong with——"

It was Bill Devery who made the mistake. He didn't know enough about Red. A month before he'd stopped a stick-up at his bank. He didn't see the difference. A swift movement of his right hand—and the staccato spat of Red's Colt. Then Bill was going down with a little whistling sound from his lips, and his hands weaving.

"The coin!" Red's words were cold, brittle. His eyes went to Duke's.

"Toss it down, Duke." I spoke as calmly as I could. "It isn't worth going out, not for some paper money."

Duke tossed it down at Red's feet. Bill Devery rolled over on his back, groaned. The lean faced one spoke again.

"It's his stomach," he stated grimly. "It'll be bad, but he may get over it. You two—let's see your backs. Right! Now walk!"

We walked. Duke was half sobbing, half cursing. I was thinking of Al Junker down on the ranch. And thinking of what a fool Bill Devery had been.

"You, Mac!" We kept walking, slowly, away from him. His voice was raised, but still cold. "You tell Junker he's talkin' too much. Tell him that when you fly down the ship, will you?"

Then he laughed, harshly. We walked on, Duke still cursing softly. There was the rumble of the Waco's engine. Red had snapped the self-starter switch. Gas? She had plenty. The rumble became suddenly a roar. Sand swept back from the prop wash at us. Duke cried out, turned. As he reached for his gun there were two flashes of red from the ship's front cockpit. Sand leaped ahead of Duke. We both dropped to our knees. The Waco got off into the air, climbed eastward into the sky. And as we ran back toward the motionless form of Bill Devery, the ship was banked to the south.

We bent down. Bill's face was white. There were voices from the road, not those of the spigs. The sound of the shots and the ship's exhaust roar had brought aid.

I turned my eyes toward Duke's. There were running lights on the Waco, but Rio Red wasn't using them. I saw that as my eyes went up toward the sky.

"You get Bill to the hospital," I muttered. "I'm flying out—down to Al Junker. He'll need help."

Duke shook his head. "How'd he get up here, Joe? He flew up. Two ships he's taken in two days. He's got 'em up here now—both across the line."

That sounded right. The Waco was a small shape in the moonlight, over on the Juarez side of the river. Two ships, and he'd taken back his thirty-five hundred. If Red had flown the other plane up from Agua Prieta——

"What's wrong? Hello, you fellows! Some spigs running away as we——"

Figures came up. I recognized Jake Connell and Bert Howden. Bill Devery was lying quietly.

"They'll get Bill in to the hospital," I muttered to Duke. "I'm going to get off in another Waco. Give me a lift after you get Bill started."

Then I headed for the hangar and the third ship. It didn't look bad for Al Junker with Rio Red five air hours away. But something was doing. And Al knew too much. He wasn't the breed who gets worried about things that don't count. He wanted a ship. Twice I'd been licked. But I'd get the third down. And by dawn. Then, if Rio Red did come——

Two to one he'd come that way. Two ships to one. But we'd have Brownings mounted on our Waco. We'd have a chance. And that was more, I thought grimly, than the other fellow usually had when he was dealing with Rio Red.

I'D BEEN in the air more than four hours. And that's a long time to be up above. There had been plenty of chance to think, to try and figure out Red's game. From Al Junker's side it looked easy. Red had killed a man, and Charley Cross had got some lead in his arm at the same time. And then Charley had been put out and Red had bought a ship. That made Al Junker's idea look all right, up to that point. But how about Red's flying back to Juarez, coming across and grabbing the second ship? And taking back the coin?

There was something bigger in Rio Red's brain than just self-protection. He was in on something that concerned other humans than Al Junker and myself. But what? Duke's guess had been that he was sitting in with the revolutionary general, Fernando Veschio. I wasn't so sure of that. Veschio was a strong man, and he had brains. He wanted weaklings under him, not men like Rio Red. That was the way I figured it.

"Heading right, anyway!" I muttered beneath the roar of the Waco's engine. "Al gets his ship, and I'll stick for a week. I'll let Duke raise hell about Red—and a lot of a good that'll do!"

I stared down over the side of the fuselage. We were within forty minutes' air flight of Agua Prieta and Douglas. A little over an hour's flight from Al's ranch. I'd have plenty to tell Al and perhaps he'd have something to tell me. It was my guess, however, that he wouldn't. Red had flown eastward after the ship steal at Douglas. Why? Had he taken the ship he'd got from me, in that place, up for a delivery? Or had he just used it to get up to El Paso?

"Might have grabbed a train up," I muttered.

I didn't really think that. It was my idea that Red had flown up. He'd got in ahead of me and planned the deal for the second ship steal. That had come off too smoothly not to have been worked out with care.

Minutes passed. I swore beneath the even beat of the ship's engine. There was a glare in the sky ahead—the lights of Douglas, and of Agua Prieta, just across the line. Beyond Douglas the country was rougher, more mountainous. Mule Mountain and Bisbee would lay to the north of our course; Junker's ranch was southwest of the copper mining town up on the mountainside.

The altimeter registered six thousand feet as I followed the Spanish Trail over Douglas. Banking slightly to the northward, I relaxed in the seat again. Rough country ahead, with only a few landing fields. Cattle made Al Junker a little money. Cotton on irrigated land made him a bit more. And there was supposed to be copper in the slope of a hill he'd named Blue Butte. If Rio Red would keep clear of Al and Al's men, would give him a chance——

I stopped thinking about that. In a second I was stiff in the cockpit of the Waco. Coming up from the west, a few miles ahead and holding an air course that would intercept mine, was a plane! And one long inspection, in the clear moonlight of the night, was enough to tell me that she was a three-place ship, a Waco!

For several seconds I watched her, holding my course. Douglas and Agua Prieta were behind; the ranch was now within thirty miles of the air through which I was flying. But the other Waco was flying in to cut us off, and coming across from Mexico.

"Not Rio Red!" I muttered thickly. "But there's that other ship!"

I broke off, zoomed my plane. My eyes went to the other shape. It zoomed, too. I swore grimly. Not Red? I couldn't be sure of that. It had been thirty minutes before I'd got into the air. I'd waited for a doctor to say that Bill Devery had a good chance to pull through, and it had taken a little time to tune up the Waco I was flying. If Red had been able to get gas, somewhere in Mexico, he could have beaten me down to Douglas. It might be the lean faced one.

One thing was certain—I'd fight before he got a third ship. He'd knocked Duke and myself for a heavy loss already. If he thought he could intercept me——

That was exactly what the pilot of the approaching ship thought. He climbed her as I climbed. And when I moved the stick forward, and kicked right rudder, getting her in a bank to the northward he changed his plane's course—and roared toward my Waco. We were within a half mile of each other now.

I didn't open the ship's engine wide. She hadn't had enough air hours for that. But I gave her all she could stand and got back on the original course. The altitude was better than eight thousand and the other ship was banking around, getting set to come up close to me. A quarter mile of moonlighted air separated us, and I caught the glint of something long and round, mounted on the cowling of the other ship, just back of the engine. A Browning or a Lewis—synchronized to shoot between the whirling blades of the propeller!

THE other ship was coming in at an angle. An arm flashed into sight from the front cockpit. A thumb pointed downward. Below and a short distance ahead there was a sort of mesa. Clumps of gray-blue mesquite and cactus—a level stretch. I was supposed to set the plane down there.

The stick moved back toward the cloth of my sheepskin coat. We zoomed. And above the changed tone of the pulling engine came the sharp clatter of machine-gun fire. Red streamed out ahead and above my Waco. I let her fall off on a wing, went into a stiff spin. And I held her in the spin.

At three thousand I pulled her out of it, got direction as the dizziness passed, and headed toward the Junker ranch. I stared over the side of the fuselage. The other ship was somewhere behind, in a blind spot for me. But I had a hunch that the other pilot had failed to follow me down in so tight a spin.

Then it sounded again and I knew my hunch was wrong. The sharp, staccato clatter of that other Waco's gun. Red streaking the air to the left.

I nosed the plane down toward the mesa and as I did so the shape of the other ship came up on the left. She was within twenty yards of my plane, momentarily. And with the moonlight on that lean face, even though it was helmeted and goggled, I couldn't miss. Rio Red!

Wind shrilled through the flying wires as both planes dove with engine cut. Rio Red, flying a ship with a mounted gun. That made one thing certain. He had flown up from Douglas, with the first plane he had taken from me. Then, when he had held the gun on us and taken the second ship, some one had prop-synchronized the gun on the other ship. Where? Across the line, over back of Juarez, probably. He had had no time to mount a gun on the second ship he had stolen—not a shooting gun. And this one was shooting.

We shrilled downward, but when we neared the surface of the mesa Rio Red banked his plane off a bit and then banked in again. That let me get ahead of him and kept my ship in range of his gun. Red was no bigger fool now than he'd ever been.

I groaned, gave the ship the gun to clear a nasty, thickly spotted mesquite stretch, and then pulled her tail assembly down. We made a fair landing. And I had an idea. As the ship slowed down I snapped the ignition switch. The key was in my hand as I dropped down to the sand, and so was the automatic I'd borrowed from Duke.

The other Waco made a nice landing and Red taxied her up within about fifty yards of mine. Then he slid over the side, his Colt held ready for action. His eyes spotted my gun.

"Toss it down, Mac!" he snapped grimly. "Then climb right back in the ship and fly where I'm telling you."

I stiffened. Rio could shoot, I knew that. He was walking in on me now, his gun held almost carelessly. Almost, but not quite.

"Toss it down!" he repeated in a knife-edged tone. "We're going across, Mac. We're going back of Prieta. A friend of mine wants some ships back there. Needs 'em in his business. You an' me, we'll take two of 'em back. Costello's bringing along the other."

I forgot about the gun he held. "The hell we'll take 'em back!" I snapped. "You can play in——"

His gun spat sharply above the throttled down tone of his plane's engine. Sand made a little spurt at my feet. I released my grip on the automatic. It was small caliber, and Red had ceased to walk in closer.

"You get off and head south. Don't fly over Prieta; keep west of the town. Vallejo is about eighty miles back. We'll land there. There'll be a white cloth 'T' out for us. Maybe you can get a job—" there was an amused note in his voice—"flying for Veschio."

I stiffened. It was out now. Red was playing in with the rebel chief, getting him ships. He'd need pilots, of course. There wouldn't be much question about me getting the job. Duke had been right. Red had lied to him when he had been accused of sitting in with the revolutionary chief, back at El Paso. And Al Junker had been wrong. Red wasn't playing for a chance at him. Not just now. His game was bigger.

"Red," I stated slowly, as he walked up close to me, "it's no go. You don't get me chasing federals across the line. Might as well take your lead as theirs. You know how it is. The renegades always get it in the end. Veschio'll go the same way. And so will those with him. It isn't like old times. Mexico's government has changed."

Red Bund sneered. "Cut the preaching and climb aboard," he advised.

I shook my head. "No go, Red," I stated. "I'm through. You can't fly two ships across, not alone. They'll be hot after you on this side. You murdered Charley Cross and then you finished Bill Devery. They've got something on you now, Red. Go ahead, squeeze that trigger! And then get into the air, Red—with *one* ship. And stay on the other side, after this!"

Heroic? I didn't feel that way. My hands were shaking. But it was a good gamble. I wouldn't be worth much, mixed up as a pilot in a revolution that was sure to fail, eighty miles back in Mexico. And Rio Red, he had something to worry about. He could only take one ship across, back to Veschio. He wouldn't gain much in squeezing that trigger. He had brains enough to figure that. At least, I gambled he had.

And he had. He stood about ten feet away, with a peculiar grin on his face, his eyes half narrowed, his lips compressed.

"Mac," he said slowly, and his lean figure relaxed a bit in the moonlight, "you got guts. It ain't right for you to be sellin' planes and ferryin' them around. I'll hand you back that thirty-five hundred."

I shook my head. "You won't get the ships across, Red," I stated slowly. "They'll get you in a hurry now. They've got something on you. Nothing doing!"

The Colt came up a foot; his face twisted as rage gripped him. It looked for a split second as if I'd talked too much. But I hadn't. He laughed harshly.

"There's another way, Mac," he muttered. "I can fly one ship across, walk back a mile, an' get the other. An' you'll be where you won't know anything about what's——"

He broke off; his gun hand went rigid as my arm snapped sideways. His whole body was tense. My eyes were on his.

"What in hell?" he commenced, but I cut in on him.

"Ignition key," I said, in as level a tone as I could use. "Small one, Red, if you can find it I'm licked. And if you can't——"

I shrugged my shoulders. Once again rage struck at Rio Red. He knew what his chances were of finding a far flung ignition key in the sand of the mesa. Chances? About ten thousand to one. They just about did not exist. And the big question was, would I? It was up to Rio Red.

He swore grimly, bitterly. But he wasn't through yet. No fool, that lean-faced one.

"You tried to stop me, Mac. But I don't need that key. You don't. You can start that engine without it. You're a mechanic, and so am I."

He moved toward me, and I watched him reverse his grip on the Colt, watched his fingers close over the barrel thickness.

"You'll go across, Mac!" His voice was hoarse. "And when you get back to the runt's camp you can decide about flyin'! My bet is——"

Then he swung the Colt up. It flashed blackly in the moonlight. I threw up my arms. But his downward blow had strength back of it. The metal battered my left wrist aside. There was a stabbing pain almost on the top of my head. An eighth of an inch of helmet leather didn't help much.

Rio Red struck again, then stepped back. There was a film of white mist before my eyes. I tried to strike out. Then I was falling forward. And the mesa was very suddenly all black.

WHEN I came out of it I was wabbling in the rear cockpit of a Waco. The seat was built for two passengers. That's why I was wabbling. I shook my head a few times, leaned over the side of the fuselage and got some cold, Mexican air down into my lungs. Mexican? I knew that right away. We had just about got across the line. The Waco was still climbing, and by looking down below the tail assembly I could see the other ship resting on the mesa.

I sat motionless for sixty seconds or so, and watched Red get altitude. It was evident that he wanted altitude before he flew back into Mexico. And that puzzled me. He was wasting time. It looked that way to me. And evidently he wasn't figuring on coming back in a hurry for the other ship.

My hands went down to my waist. I swore softly. I was sitting on my Irving seat-pack. Red hadn't stripped me of my 'chute, and I was riding behind him. I wondered if he'd ever heard of a fellow doing a header over the tail assembly. It's been done more than once.

"Figured we'd be over Mexican soil, that I wouldn't jump!" I muttered a bit weakly. "Or maybe he figured I'd stay unconscious until——"

I stopped, straightened in the cockpit. My eyes widened. Looking off to the southwest I had a better explanation. Red had figured just one thing—he'd better get me aboard and get into the air before the plane flying toward the border got too close! And the ship was a single-seater, flying from the Mexican interior!

A single-seater, and fast. She came in at an angle. I shook off as much dizziness as I could and snapped the safety belt which Red must have buckled. My eyes caught the glint of the single-seater's gun barrel. She was a T. I. scout, and the federal government had bought a dozen of them from the U. S. A. less than a year ago.

Red's helmeted head was less than three

feet from me. With one savage blow from a fist I could batter him enough to get the plane out of control——

But I didn't. It meant that I'd have to go over the side, and that meant that the pilot of the federal plane could riddle me with lead as I drifted down in the 'chute harness. There were mountains ahead. Below, the earth sloped too much for a good landing. And I had the idea that one of the two ships would never again make a good landing.

The single-seater had altitude in spite of Red's efforts. Her pilot dove her and opened up as Red went over on a wing. The single-seater's prop-synchronized gun rattled in a long burst. We went into a spin, came out of it, nosed up. A shape streaked above, flame streamed from Red's gun. I cried out hoarsely. The single-seater went into a tight spin and stayed in it!

Red had scored a hit. It must have been something like the old days, the Army days. Rumor had it that Lieutenant Bund had shot down more than one enemy plane in France. My eyes were over the side, on the single-seater, which was now flaming—when the Waco started to go down. I stiffened, half rose in the cockpit.

The ship came out of the spin, started a shallow glide, went into another spin. I reached for the rip-cord ring in the harness over my left hip. And Red jerked his head around.

His eyes told the story. One glance and I knew that some of the bullets from the single-seater's gun had found his body. But he fought the plane out of the spin mechanically, getting the controls in neutral, going into a steeper glide this time.

"Don't—jump!" he managed, above the shrilling of wind through wires and rigging.

I hesitated, as he turned his head to the front again. The Waco was gliding for the mesa. The other ship was clearly outlined there, marking the spot as we came down. We were within a thousand feet of the earth now.

My eyes went down, back toward Mexico. On the nearest slope there was a great ball of fire. No sound of the crash came through the shrilling of the wind as we glided, but the color told the tale. One more for Rio Red. I felt a sudden, sincere admiration. Red was a fighter.

Fifty feet off the ground the Waco wavered and for seconds I thought he was losing control, that we'd crash. It looked as though I should have got over the side and used the 'chute. But we didn't crash. Red steadied the glide, got more air speed by a greater angle of dive, and then pulled back on the stick. I held my breath and waited. We hit once, bounced seven or eight feet over a clump of mesquite, and then he held the stick back and pancaked her down.

We hit hard. The landing gear crackled, let us down all the way. But we stayed right side up. I got to my feet, waited. Red still had the guns.

But that was all he had. The power to use them was gone. He twisted his head, smiling a twisted smile. He cut the engine switch and everything was suddenly very quiet. His lips moved. I got my head nearer his.

"All—done, Mac!" His voice was very weak. "He got me. Bullets came through—fuselage."

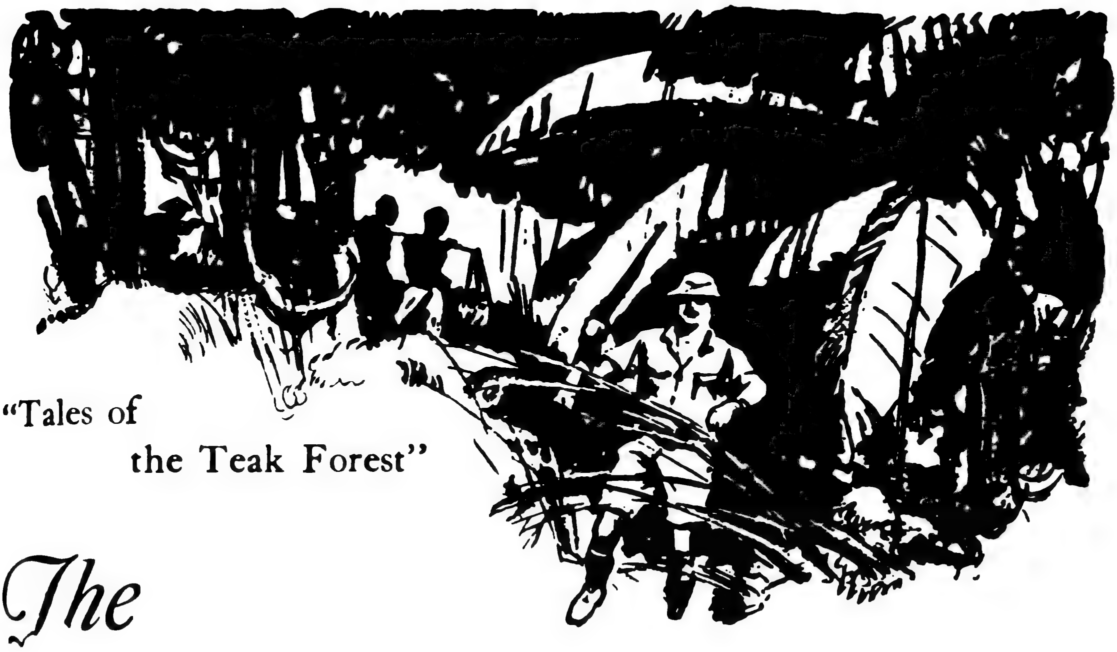
My eyes went down to the holes in the fuselage fabric. Red's body was hunching forward. But he tried to grin.

"Thirty-five hundred—in my right side pocket. Yours, Mac. They were looking for me. But I—got you back. That's—something——"

He pitched forward, only the safety belt holding his body in the seat. I slipped a hand inside his flying coat, inside his khaki shirt. Then I dropped down to the sand and mesquite. Rio Red was through flying the border. Through taking things that didn't belong to him.

A wind was blowing up from Mexico. It was cold and dawn was not so far away. My right hand fingers pulled a key out of a pocket. It was the other key—to the other ship. There was the thirty-five hundred; we had only lost one plane. I could get Red into the other Waco, fly him into Douglas. The ship he'd landed would be safe enough for a short time. It was all clear enough. Red had tried to get Veschio some ships—and in a hurry. He'd failed.

It was funny, but I felt sort of bad about the finish. Pretty white, getting me back. A fighter—Rio Red!



"Tales of
the Teak Forest"

The PRICE *of the* TUSKS

Of Ai Feeung and the Stolen Ivory

By REGINALD CAMPBELL

POO NGURN was a nuisance. He had once managed to slip his hobbles during the night and join up with a wild elephant herd, and it was only by the merest chance that John Hinton, teak-wallah and manager of the Siamese Timber Company, had been able to effect the animal's recapture. Ever since this occurrence Hinton had insured that extra strong hobbles were placed around Poo Ngurn's powerful forefeet; for the white man sensed that the elephant, having once tasted freedom, would always be wishing to regain it. And since Poo Ngurn was one of the fastest moving elephants in Northern Siam, Hinton knew well that should the brute escape a second time, in all probability he would never be seen by human eyes again.

Poo Ngurn was also a nuisance in another way, for he reveled in breaking into native plantations at night and eating his full of whatever offered itself to his powerful, wriggling trunk.

Thus it came about that, one sunny November morning, John Hinton stood in the sugar cane plantation of one Ai Oi, who complained bitterly. Had not the elephant Poo Ngurn, hobbled though he was, laid waste the work of years by trampling down and devouring nearly all the canes in the plantation? It was bad business, and he, Ai Oi, required many hundreds of ticals by way of compensation.

By Ai Oi's side, as he grumbled, stood his daughter, Chan Ooan, who was dusky, beautiful, and wonderful to behold. She stood silent while her sire stated his grievance, though ever and anon she flashed glances from sloe-black eyes at the white lord listening gravely to the merits of the case.

Ai Oi finally stopped talking from sheer exhaustion, whereupon John Hinton went carefully around the plantation. He noted the damage, examined with searching eyes the pulpy, cane-squashed ground, and eventually he straightened himself and looked Ai Oi fully in the face.

"Ai Oi," said he, "the damage done by Poo Ngurn last night amounts to one hundred ticals."

"But, Lord," complained the other, "the damage done in the plantation comes to over three hundred ticals. That is plain."

"It does," agreed Hinton grimly.

In which John Hinton was correct. The estimate of the damage certainly did amount to the latter sum, but from the result of his inspection it was clear that Poo Ngurn had done the initial havoc, and human hands the rest.

It was all so simple. The price of sugar cane was low, very low this year. Then Poo Ngurn had come, like a heaven-sent opportunity, to Ai Oi's plantation, eaten one hundred ticals' worth of cane, and after his departure Ai Oi himself, together with his daughter, had laid waste the rest. Thus would they dispose of the entire crop at good profit by obtaining damages for the whole amount from the white lord whose company owned the elephant.

"I give," continued Hinton relentlessly, "one hundred ticals, which is all the damage for which the Great Company is responsible. Here is the money."

The cash changed hands, and a renewed flood of grumbles issued from the betel stained mouth of old Ai Oi. He was a ruined man; the sole means of his livelihood were gone; he would be compelled to live on the stale honey of wild bees; of a truth the white lord was not just, and he was bitterly disappointed.

Hinton shrugged his shoulders and, swinging on his heel, returned to his tent.

THE following morning grave news came to Hinton. Ai Feeung, the Lao rider of Poo Ngurn, a hard working, efficient, reliable mahout, approached him with the information that Poo Ngurn's tusks had been cut off during the night. He, Ai Feeung, on going out at dawn this morning to catch his elephant for work, had discovered the crime. Of the missing tusks he could find no trace.

Hinton frowned and, dismissing the mahout, sank into thought.

So, he reflected, Ai Oi had taken speedy revenge upon both Poo Ngurn and himself. But how bring the crime home on the old scoundrel? To go forthwith to the ancient's hut and search for the tusks would, he knew, be worse than useless. The tusks would certainly be hidden elsewhere, and the only result of the visit would be to make him, Hinton, look like a fool—which was not at all to his liking. Also there would be Chan Ooan, Ai Oi's beautiful daughter, to reckon with, and when a woman was in the case Hinton felt utterly at a loss. He could deal with men, white, yellow or brown, but the opposite sex frankly frightened him. He couldn't get at the working of their brains, so to speak, and from what he had heard of Chan Ooan he knew that she possessed, not only beauty, but a clever head upon her shapely, chocolate-colored shoulders.

That her shoulders were indeed shapely was beyond doubt, for many were the suitors which had come from time to time to woo her. All these, however, had been turned down, since, so Hinton's boy had told him, Ai Oi was hoping that one day some rich native trader would put in an appearance and fall to Chan Ooan's charms. Thus would the old man be assured of a large sum of money for parting with his blossom.

But meanwhile, till that dusky prince should come, Ai Oi had now the sum of one hundred ticals and a pair of tusks which, after a suitable interval, he would dispose for good profit over the China border.

Thus reasoned John Hinton till the sun was mounting high into the sky, whereupon he walked out of his tent to superintend the working of his elephants.

He found them engaged in the task of rolling felled teak logs down a steep hillside into a small river that ran below, and among them was Poo Ngurn, now shorn of his beautiful tusks. But, where before the elephant had, with lightning rapidity, sent log after log tumbling and crashing down the incline, now the handling of timber had become for him a wearisome affair. No longer could he bend his massive head and, using the long, shapely tusks as levers, fling heavy teakwood downhill like so many matches. Instead, Poo Ngurn was obliged to recourse to his trunk, which soon became sore and swollen, with the result that shortly Hinton ordered him to rest.

"Aaiee," exclaimed the mahout of another elephant as he watched Poo Ngurn roll slowly off to graze, "thou hast only a female elephant to ride now, Ai Feeung."

A roar of laughter went up from the remainder of the mahouts, and Ai Feeung, as he slipped off his charge's head, flushed darkly. Hinton, who had overheard the remark, also reddened in vexation, for the truth had been spoken. Poo Ngurn without his tusks, was of no more use for timber work than any timid female, and the result of Ai Oi's action had been that the working value of the elephant had depreciated to the extent of at least five hundred ticals, this apart from the actual market price of the tusks themselves.

"The old devil," muttered Hinton as, the day's work at an end, he strode back to his tent, "I'll get him yet."

Once there, he summoned Ai Oi immediately to him, for he feared that the native, emboldened by the success of his first enterprise, might attempt further raids on the tusks of some of the other company elephants in the vicinity.

"Ai Oi," said the white man, when the ancient salaamed before him, "doubtless thou hast heard that the tusks of Poo Ngurn, my swiftest elephant, have been cut. And who should cut them but one who is of evil mind towards me?"

Ai Oi shifted on his hams and looked sullenly at the ground without replying. Hinton continued:

"To cut the tusks is one thing; to dispose of them another, for are they not heavy? Moreover, I have many spies throughout the length and breadth of the land. Thus shall information reach me should two pieces of ivory, long and curling, be seen being carried towards the border."

In the pause that followed Ai Oi signified that doubtless the white lord was correct, but the affair had nought to do with him.

"Meanwhile," resumed Hinton, "I will remain in this camp till the matter shall come to light. And it would be well for Ai Oi to remember that sometimes confession may save much trouble afterwards. Now *go!*"

At the words Ai Oi rose stiffly to his feet and, with a flood of grumbles that turned the air sulphuric, took his tottering departure.

Hinton, left alone, smiled grimly. He had neither spies from whom to obtain information, nor the leisure to remain long in his present camp, but he hoped that he had put the fear of God into the old man's mind, and that consequently no more outrages would occur. Meanwhile the company monthly accounts had to be closed. So Hinton dismissed the other matter from his thoughts and worked long with figures.

THE next day, a Sunday, which was a period of rest for both man and beast, passed uneventfully till evening, when things happened, and with surprising rapidity.

Firstly, the little headman staggered into Hinton's tent, dragging a large pair of iron hobbles behind him.

"What is this?" demanded the white man somewhat snappishly. He had a mild bout of fever brewing in him, and was in no mood for conversation at the moment.

"Lord," said the other nervously, "but ten minutes ago I make my evening rounds. I come upon these hobbles in the forest. They are the hobbles of Poo Ngurn, and of Poo Ngurn there is no trace."

"Then send for Ai Feeung," barked Hinton.

The headman spread despairing hands. "Lord, I have sought for him without avail. Every coolie, chainman and mahout in the camp have I asked, but one and all say that they have seen nought of him since the morning."

"H'm," muttered Hinton thoughtfully. "I wonder what's coming next."

The question was speedily answered by the sudden appearance of Ai Oi, and one glance at him assured the other two that it was evil tidings that he bore, for the old man's features were the color of chalk and his eyes well nigh starting from his head.

"My daughter, Chan Ooan," he croaked, as he subsided on to the ground sheet of the tent. "The Lord has seen her this day?"

"The Lord has seen nought of her this day."

Ai Oi raised skinny arms heavenwards. "It is beyond my understanding," he quavered. "At dawn she say she go look for fish in the *Hwe,* for she like fish curry. But she no come back for midday rice. I wait one hour, two hour, three hour, then go seek her, but without avail. Now evening come, and she still not come back. A tiger, perhaps a devil——"

"It would appear," Hinton broke in, "that neither was it a tiger, nor was it a devil, but one Ai Feeung, late mahout of Poo Ngurn, who has taken her, for he also has disappeared."

At the words Ai Oi's jaw dropped till his mouth was one black, toothless, betelnut stained cavern of astonishment. Then, recovering himself, he began to talk. He talked well, undoubtedly, very well indeed, in language that, though terse, brief, and very much to the point, lasted exactly fifteen minutes by the clock on Hinton's camp table.

He understood everything now, of course he did. Had not he himself noticed that his daughter, for the last few days, had been restless, not quite herself somehow? He had thought then that her complaint had been fever brought about by eating too many bamboo shoots, but now he realized that it was a very different sort of fever. Love fever, in fact. And now she had run off with a worthless mahout after he had cherished her like the apple of his eye. A worthless mahout of all people! Thus had she shown her gratitude to him, her father. He would seek her out, he would; bring her back to him, flog her into insensibility; then fling her body to the dogs. Or no; he would wash his hands of her and let her die in the forest with the villain who had stolen her. Thus . . . .

Eventually Hinton cut him short and tersely ordered him out of the tent. When the old man had gone, and the atmosphere cleared somewhat, Hinton dismissed the headman and concentrated his mind on the problem that confronted him.

After a while he gave vent to a loud and prolonged whistle, for the plot indeed had thickened. He reasoned thus:

Chan Ooan, being in love, had betrayed the whereabouts of the tusks to Ai Feeung. The latter, being also in that blissful state of mind, had then secretly unearthed the tusks from where Ai Oi had hidden them, after which he had bolted on Poo Ngurn, taking with him both the ivories and his girl. And he had chosen his time well in leaving on a Sunday morning, for that day being a period of rest, his absence would not be discovered for several hours, consequently owing to Poo Ngurn's great speed he would be many miles distant by the time the hue and cry was raised.

So far so good, thought Hinton. And now for the means of bringing the culprits to book. Ai Feeung would, he reflected, in all probability make for the Indo-China border, one hundred miles away to the northeast. There he would dispose of the tusks and the elephant as well, and with the proceeds settle down comfortably for life with the girl who was his partner in the crime.

Now—Hinton's gray eyes hardened—the stealing of an elephant was a serious matter, and it behooved him to take immediate action and follow up the criminals. He therefore summoned his little headman and gave him directions to prepare for a forced march at dawn the next morning, after which John Hinton went early to bed in order to obtain as much rest as possible before the coming ordeal.

THERE followed ten days of the most terrific going Hinton had ever known. The path which led away to the northward was a path only in name, consisting as it did, of anything from loose rubble to iron-hard rock. No elephant footprints showed upon it, but the weather being very dry Hinton doubted whether tracks would be visible in any case; moreover, there was always the risk that Ai Feeung had avoided the main path and taken a short cut through the jungle to his destination.

Undaunted, however, Hinton pushed on, and after five days' toiling through wild rolling country, covered with evergreen forest, he reached the Indo-China border. There reposed an Annamite village, where he made inquiries to find that nought had been seen of an elephant with missing tusks. Having assured himself that the inhabitants were speaking the truth, there was nothing for it but to return the way he had come.

This he did, but, although he knew it was hopeless, occasionally he branched off the path and made wide sweeps through the forest itself on the slight chance that Ai Feeung might be hiding in the jungle till the search should wear itself out.

Now the path had been bad enough, but during these sweeps the going was beyond description. The ground was as hard as iron, and interspersed with sharp, pointed rocks that stabbed through Hinton's footwear as easily as a needle pierces cheese. On the dark, evergreen leaves that clustered over the earth were hundreds of leeches. They flicked themselves up his puttees; they wriggled their thin, black bodies through the lace holes of his boots; they fed succulently on his feet, ankles shins and knees. Mosquitoes, sweat bees ticks, and a thousand other horrors clustered thick upon him, while from overhead thorns, creepers, vines and stinging grass plucked, tore and scratched as h fought blindly forward through the dim, unearthly light that brooded in the depths of the forest.

But Hinton's efforts were all in vain, for not a sign was forthcoming of either Poo Ngurn or the humans who had ridden him, and eventually, after twelve days' nightmare, the white man found himself back in his old camp with his baggage elephants dead lame, his coolies exhausted, and his own condition bordering on nervous breakdown.

His tent put up, he had a hot bath, took a stiff dose of quinine, then stretched himself out on a long rattan chair to ease his aching legs.

As the sun sank lower in the heavens, its rays gradually crept inside the tent and shone softly on his worn, rugged features. The expression on his face was infinitely sad, for he felt weary, not only in body, but in spirit. One of his best mahouts, a man he would have trusted anywhere, had betrayed him all because of one small brown woman with flashing eyes and shapely shoulders. And Ai Feeung would live to regret his act, of that Hinton was certain, as also would Chan Ooan directly she found her man was regaining his senses again thinking matters out.

"Confound all women—" began Hinton. Then the words choked in his throat and he drew one hand in a dazed, uncertain fashion across his forehead.

For, swinging in peerless stride across the clearing towards the tent, was Poo Ngurn of the missing tusks, and on his back were the two human beings. They were Ai Feeung, mahout, and Chan Ooan, daughter of Ai Oi the grumbler.

On nearing the tent Poo Ngurn halted of his own accord, whereupon his riders slid off onto the ground. For a few seconds they stood uncertainly, then their knees gave way beneath them and they slowly sank upon the earth.

Hinton sprang to his feet and rushed out into the clearing.

"Lord," croaked Ai Feeung, and the white man saw that the Lao's cheeks were ashen and so thin that the bones shone literally through the skin, "Lord, we have found Poo Ngurn. As for the tusks, they are buried beneath the fifth *yang* tree to the right of the camp."

And then did Ai Feeung roll slowly over on his side and speak no more.

ONE hour later Ai Feeung and his girl were squatting on the ground sheet of Hinton's tent. In their interiors were large quantities of well cooked rice, though first Hinton had forced between their ashen lips generous spoonfuls of sweet, condensed milk, strongly laced with brandy, which had brought them round to consciousness again.

"And now that thou hast eaten, Ai Feeung," said Hinton as he regarded the pair, "the time has come for talk."

"Lord," replied the mahout, "we will confess all. It was *I*, Lord, Ai Feeung, who cut the tusks."

"Ha!" breathed Hinton.

"Listen, Lord. It happened like this. Chan Ooan and I, we love each other, but we have to meet secretly, for we know that Ai Oi not look upon me favorably, being a very poor man. Then comes the matter of the sugar canes, in which Ai Oi is cross with Master, though Master fair to him, for was it not Ai Oi himself who did most of the damage?"

"It was," agreed John Hinton.

"After this happen, Chan Ooan and I, we decide to cut the tusks from off Poo Ngurn, for we think that the Master will suspect Ai Oi. We know Ai Oi not go to prison, as no evidence against him. Then perhaps, later, we cut more tusks, which we first hide and then sell secretly. Thus would I, Ai Feeung, have much money with which to marry Chan Ooan."

"A splendid scheme," breathed the white man, thunder-struck.

Ai Feeung continued. "Day after I cut the tusks I sorry, for I see Poo Ngurn not work so well. Also the other mahouts, they laugh at me. I think, and the more I think the more sorry I become, for I love elephants, also—" the speaker hesitated, "also you, Master. But I not know what to do. Then Sunday morning Chan Ooan and I meet and go walk together through the forest. We find hobbles on the ground, and see that Poo Ngurn escape during the night, though how we do not know."

"You did not know?" exclaimed Hinton, startled.

"Master, we knew nothing. Then I say, I go find Poo Ngurn. I bring him back, and Master glad. Then I confess all and Master, perhaps he forgive. I think I no see Master before I go, for I afraid, also it waste much time. Then Chan Ooan try to stop me. She say impossible to find Poo Ngurn. I say I go all same. She say she go with me. We go. We find him, but we take a long time, for he walk fast to rejoin wild elephant herd. Then we bring him back, but, Lord, we nearly die."

Ai Feeung, his tale ended, relapsed into silence, and Hinton coughed a trifle gruffly, for he knew that the absolute truth had been told him. He pictured that scene in the forest—"You my man, I go with you." He saw the blind trails along which these two had gone together. He saw the dim, unearthly light of the evergreen jungle. He saw them, innocent as children, snatching brief rests on the rocky, leech infested ground. He heard the trumpet of wild elephants and the coughing roar of the tiger and panther that stalked through the darkened wilderness and turned night to a living horror. And through all this he saw a man and a girl, growing weaker and weaker, yet pushing on, to clear their honor.

A long silence followed, in which John Hinton strove for words. Then a shadow darkened the tent, and a moment later Ai Oi the grumbler, who had heard of his daughter's arrival, entered.

"So, Chan Ooan," he said, and his face was evil, "thou hast returned?"

"Father, I have returned."

"As thou left here?"

"As I left here," she answered steadily.

"That may or may not be. But, whatever the case, bad times await thee, Chan Ooan." The speaker stretched out a skinny hand and clawed her shoulder. "Come with me," he said roughly.

"Silence!" The word came from John Hinton, and at the sharp command of the voice Ai Oi dropped his hand and shifted his feet uneasily.

For a while the white man regarded the ancient with a fixed and merciless stare, and then he spoke.

"In the matter of the tusks, Ai Oi," he said slowly. "I made one mistake, but—" he paused meaningly, "when I do make one, I take care I make no other."

"Lord, I do not understand."

"But I do," snapped Hinton. "On a certain Saturday night thou didst say to thyself, the Lord Hinton has unjustly suspected me of cutting an elephant's tusks. Therefore will I take revenge on the Lord Hinton by slipping that elephant's hobbles. Thus will the escape of Poo Ngurn, wh is very swift, cause grievous loss to th white lord."

During the pause that followed, the knocking of the old man's knees became audible, and the bowels melted within his quaking stomach. Hinton continued:

"Thou hast done great evil, Ai Oi. Firstly, thou hast tried to steal many hundreds of ticals from the Great Company in the matter of the sugar canes. Secondly, thou hast let loose an elephant of the Great Company. For the latter, however, thou didst have certain excuses. I will therefore be kind, and overlook both these affairs—at a price."

"And the price, Lord?" queried Ai Oi.

"Thy daughter shall be free to marry whomsoever she chooses."

Five minutes later Ai Oi, under threat of instant imprisonment, capitulated, then took his departure. As the flood of grumbles died away into the distance, John Hinton turned to Ai Feeung and Chan Ooan, still squatting meekly on the ground.

"The cutting of Poo Ngurn's tusks is a serious matter," he told them. "For that also there is a price to pay."

Ai Feeung took the hand of the brown maiden, and together they rose and faced the white man.

"Lord," said the mahout steadily, "you have brought us much happiness. Whatever the price is, that shall we pay. If I work for years without one silver tical it matters not. If——"

"The price," broke in John Hinton, "I shall not measure in silver. The price is—that from now onwards thou shalt be a good mahout to me. Thou shalt help Nai Tar, the headman, and be his right hand man. If evil is plotted amidst the coolies, thou shalt stand up against them, without fear of thine own kind. It is good?"

"It is good," said Ai Feeung brokenly. "Master, on the honor of my father's father, I swear that never again will I betray you."

Chan Ooan slipped down on her knees. Her full bosom was heaving, and her dark eyes glowed with tears.

"Lord," she whispered, "we shall have many piccanninies. The first will I call Yohn, the second Hintoon, the third whatsoever the Lord——"

"The palaver is finished," shouted Hinton hastily. "Get you gone."

They went.

BLACK SHEEP

By

RAYMOND S. SPEARS

THE story of the desperadoes helps us understand the spirit of the West, which subordinates honesty to courage. Here lies the crux of the matter. When the Civil War broke out, Texas was a pasture land over which the cattle herds were spreading, working and drifting westward. After five years hundreds of thousands of the animals had run wild, the calves unbranded, the heifers, cows and bulls at large. They were as feral as the buffalo herds, but ages of domestication had left the instinct of tractability.

The soldiers returned from the Civil War. Southerners, especially the ruined and unreconciled, left the war scourged plantations to take up the difficulties and opportunities beyond the Mississippi. Northerners equally restless after campaigning moved on out of New England, and the Ohio-Illinois districts into the West. The buffalo hunters, the gold seekers, the land claimers, their hangers-on, spread wide, elbowing the scatterings of Indians aside. The no man's land and the no man's cattle were taken up in great areas and in varied numbers to be held or lost to claim-jumpers or rival beef catchers. Might literally was right. Sectional animosities, differences of practice as to right and wrong, the surprises of unexpected overlapping claims led to family, personal, and even community combats, like Wild Bill Hickok's duels or the town feuds of southwestern Kansas.

But everywhere, under every circumstance a man was good in proportion to his courage. Physically this was a return to the attitude of the lion or the eagle. But in the domain of the soul probably the human race has never seen a superior exhibition of moral valor.

The professional killers developed a code. The banditry had their gay liberalities. To be a tenderfoot plodding Westward was a greater satisfaction than any known to those who remained at home, sensible, industrious and complacent in justifiable content. We speak of the "freedom of the West," but a new set of rules, laws, customs, were formulated and these removed trammels of outworn customs, societies and governmental practices.

The greatest, most successful of the bandits were victims of sectional hates, or of social or legal injustice, or were genuine adventurers. The mankillers were upholding, at the risk of their own lives, a kind of chivalric code. And those who lived for honor always were the admired of even those who in their own practice emulated the thrifty squirrel rather than the squandering wolf or cougar. And as for the dancing girls, they were few among a great throng of lonely men.

The stain of greed and price runs all through the roundup of the wild cattle herds, the lawlessness and the strident refrains of dance halls, but the staid and conservative, deep in their consciousness, knowing their own frailties and mistakes, rejoice in the West because there the outcasts were given their chance before the eyes of the scornful world, and out of their flight they rose with courage, and out of their despair they shone with sacrifice, and out of their misery they laid the foundations anew for their own rehabilitation as useful, honorable and forward moving humans.

The murderers, gamblers, wantons, fugitives . . . They conquered. They surged up out of their depths of despond. They took themselves as they were, and such as they were, they stood before the world in the full sincerity of their souls. They killed face to face in the open. They stole according to the mandates of their character.

For once in the history of civilization the veils and subterfuges, the lies and the duplicities were thrown aside so that the thief was a thief and the wanton an adulteress and the killer was the survivor. The adventurers of a great people threw off the irksome duties and the shackles of spirit to be themselves, unashamed and unafraid.

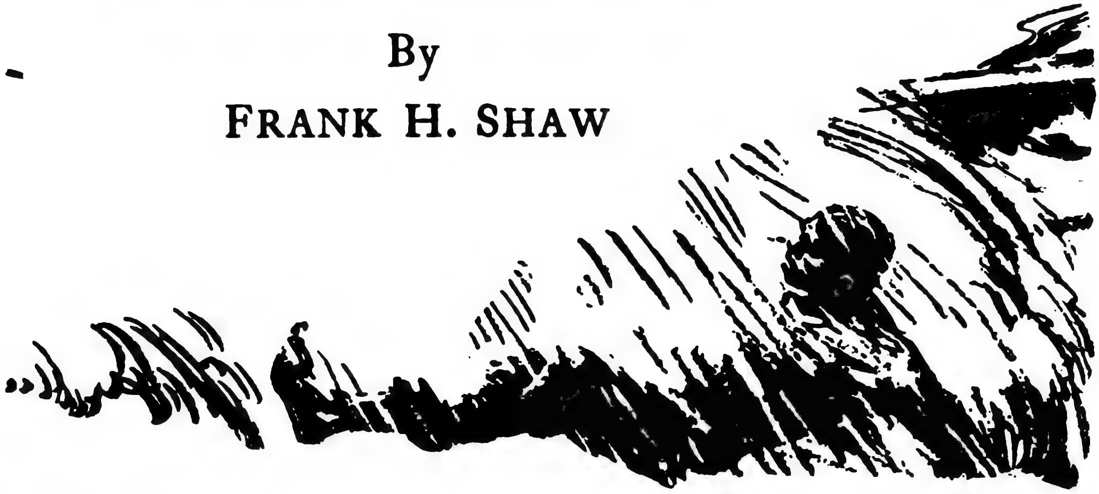
The Old West perishes as we thicken the veil over the facts.

A Novelette of Man's Mastery of the Last Frontier, the Eternal Raging Sea

COMMAND

By

FRANK H. SHAW



PEREIXA was the mate's name—José Pereixa. But Captain Hallam hardly knew him by that cognomen. When he required him he called, "Hey, Mister—Mister Mate!" And Pereixa responded, if within hearing, with the suggestion of a doglike sycophancy in his manner—the sycophancy of a dog, say, that has been mercilessly beaten into subjection. He was a good enough ship's husband, however; and kept the *Lamplough* in battleship order above deck. Down below was a different matter. Pereixa was Maltese enough to believe in superficials.

Captain Ezra Hallam called him now, as he crossed the *Lamplough's* gangplank: "Hey, Mister—Mister Mate!" And as there was no immediate response:

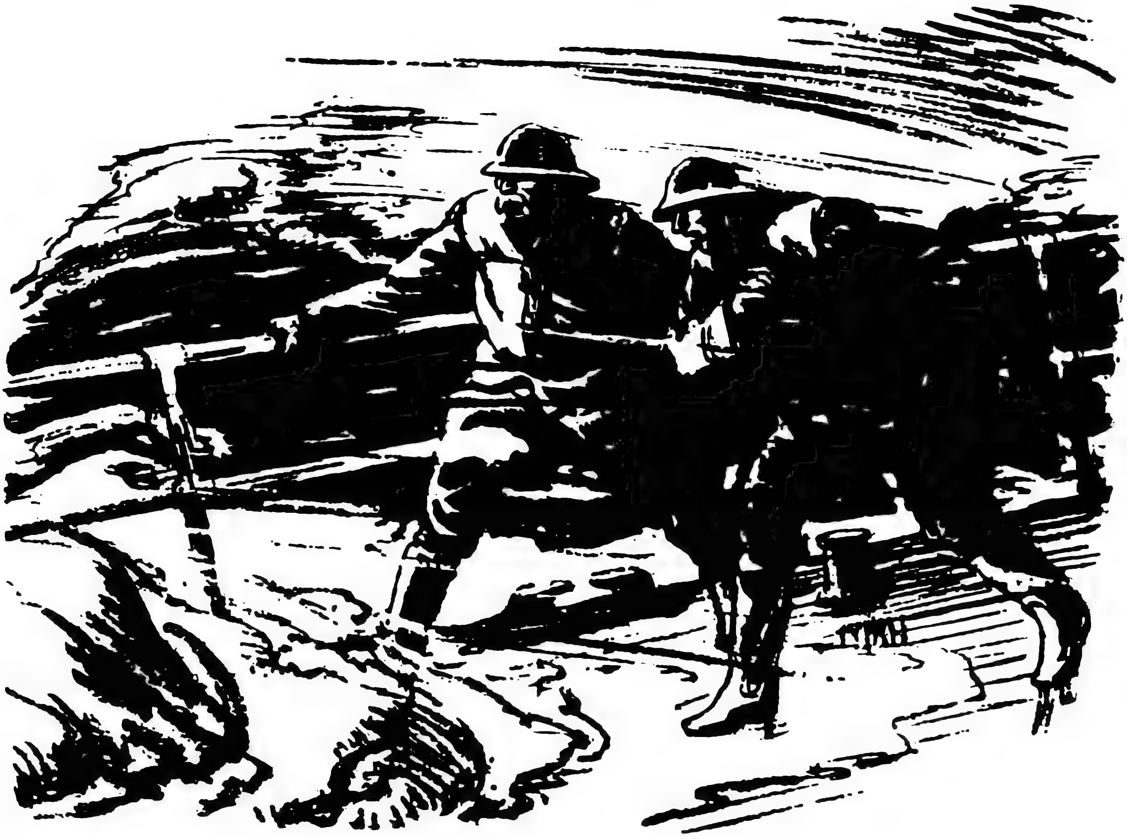
"Chief officer aboard?" he demanded of the Malayan gangwayman.

"Yassar. I go fetch!"

Captain Hallam stared over his command. The *Lamplough* was nothing to cause joy to the soul of a lover of the picturesque. She was a cheaply built and very thriftily run five thousand ton freighting tramp, and she was Chinese owned. There was no superlative trimmings about her construction. She had been originally designed for the Western Ocean trade, where decorations are of small value when the winter North Atlantic bares its teeth and snarls and follows the threat with the hurried attack. She had been intended to carry a maximum of freight at a minimum expenditure of coal, at a speed of an even nine knots per hour. Officially she was listed as being a schooner rigged, well decked, triple expansion steamship—and that summed her up. Snub-nosed she was, with an exaggerated sheer; and her stern was as unlovely as the stern of an Antwerp barge. Sitting high in the water as she did, because her inward cargo had been discharged, she gave an appearance of being startled and anxious to bolt away to some Sargasso of the forgotten, and hide. But Captain Hallam had no fault to find with her. She was his first and last command, and as such precious.

"You wanta me, sah?" asked Mr. Pereixa, shambling from below. He carried a whine in his voice, the heritage of a race that has been enslaved through many centuries.

He had been asleep on his cabin settee, and sweat was on his forehead and his exposed chest, where the singlet was unbut-



toned. His nether man was inadequately clothed with shocking drill pants, dirty and paint-smeared. He was that type of man who would infinitely rather do a job himself than tell an underling to do it. How he had attained his present position was a mystery—but Chinese-owned freighters cannot afford to be too particular. Anyhow he came into the "white man" category; though his sallow face was darker in hue than those of many of the half-castes amongst the deck crowd.

"Yes, I want you," said Hallam, and furled his green lined umbrella as he passed under the awning. "They're shipping twelve hundred passengers this trip. Coolies and their families. See the 'tweendecks are clear and ready. They'll have to live below—nights, at all events. Can't have 'em cluttering up the decks in the dark, 'specially if we hit on any weather." He meant bad weather, of course. The mate threw out an expostulatory hand and his yellow-balled eyes rolled.

"Twelf' hunderd coolie!" he protested.

"Twelve hundred Chinks, yes. Taking 'em to Chita-Lula. Phosphate diggings there. Indentured labor, like as not. What's it matter? They're human beings, to be treated as such. They'll have their own cooks and their stores will come down separately."

"Why we carry twelf' hunderd coolie, sah?" asked Pereixa.

"Because it's owner's orders, see—and our duty is to do as we're told; that's why. Get busy and smack it about, Mister Mate. It'll take us all our time to get ready for 'em by Wednesday."

"We not getta pay for carry passenger, sah!"

Captain Hallam sniffed—the Anglo-Saxon contempt for the Latin evident in the action. "We're paid to do as we are told, Mister; and we're paid damn well. Think you'd be pulling down your pay running a *dghaisa* in Valetta Harbor? Not on your perishing life you wouldn't. See to getting those 'tweendecks cleaned up—not a minute too soon, if you ask me anything."

The mind of the first mate troubled itself with fanciful fears. Twelve hundred Chinks promised several problems. In the waterside taverns he frequented when off duty, he had listened to blood-chilling talk of piracies and murders. There had been grisly instances of these pseudo-passengers rising en masse and slitting the throats of ships' companies and taking possession of the craft, to hand them over to the coastwise pirates who still flourished. Nothing would have pleased Mr. Pereixa better than to throw up the towel forthwith and clear out from the unpromising *Lamplough*. But an irresistible magnet kept him in position: the drag of his princely pay. The mate of the *Lamplough* had an enviably soft job of it; he could, an he desired, live a gentleman's life; feed on the best, and draw pay that by his countrymen's standards was opulence. And if he behaved himself, in course of time he would conceivably rise to command either the *Lamplough* or some such other ship. Then he would write to Malta and invite a swarm of Pereixas out to the China Coast to bask in the shadow of his lordly greatness; and maybe they would name a street in Valetta after him at an appointed time.

"Yes, sah. I getit 'em clean," he said humbly, and summoned his Malayan serang or boatswain. The hitherto sleeping ship bustled into leisurely activity. Hoses were uncoiled, scrubbers retrieved from hiding-places; the tindal mopped up a squad with buckets of sougee-mougee and descended into the stifling hold. It was very hot, almost unbearably so. It had been like that for several days. A man found it difficult to draw a fair breath. The atmosphere was not pellucid but leaden; and the water of the harbor was like oil, wherever the inevitable scum permitted it to be seen. When Captain Hallam entered his own deck cabin he threw open his scuttles; ridded himself of the serge double-breasted jacket he affected, opened his shirt and mopped his streaming face. Then he tapped the aneroid.

"Not natural this time of year," he opined. "Stooard!" His cabin boy came, naked save for a breech clout.

"Glass of water," commanded Hallam, "cold out of the chatty." The *Lamplough* was not modern enough to be fitted with a freezer; and Captain Hallam, who dearly loved a draught of water that set his teeth aching, was accustomed to drape the awning-spreaders of the upper bridge with an assortment of porous earthenware vessels, relying on evaporation to chill their contents. While his servant was absent, Macgregor, the chief engineer, rapped on the fly-screen of the door and entered.

"I HEARD ye were aboard," said the Scot, who had been a fitter at Renfrew, and who had manners to correspond. These two were the only clean white men aboard the *Lamplough;* and that fact made them companions. When the ship was at sea they always played cribbage together—eight games per dog watch, with a bet of a penny a hundred. Not infrequently they went ashore together. Although not garrulous in their protestations, they were friends, compelled to it by loneliness, although they had little in common. The deck and the engine room seldom fraternize aboard freighters. Macgregor was a man of one idea. He could talk of engines and the Clyde until the cows came home; but beyond that he took scant interest in the things of the world.

"Just got back," said Hallam. "They're turning us into a passenger ship, Chief." He laughed, and there was a quiet suggestion of pride in the sound. Giving him this human freight was in a way a compliment, he considered. Once the twelve hundred Celestials were aboard, the *Lamplough* out at sea, he alone was responsible for their safekeeping. He would hold more than twelve hundred souls in the palm of his hand. An error of judgment or a moment's carelessness on his part might hurl the lot into whatever eternity Celestials believed in.

"Ay, are they?" Macgregor wasn't keenly interested. He would have nothing to do with the human cargo, save drive it to its destination. The alterations in organization necessary, the makeshift contrivances required, affected his department not at all, except that, as he was responsible for the fresh water supply, it would be up to him to fill another tank of the double bottom with potable fluid, and see that it wasn't wasted. "Did ye say—?"

"Oh, yes, help yourself." Hallam jerked his bearded chin towards the locker, and laid a key on the table. He didn't altogether trust his boy where liquor was concerned. Macgregor grunted pleasedly and took out a half filled bottle of whisky. It had not altered in its contents since he had been granted a tot in the morning, prior to the captain's going ashore in Hanglau; for Hallam was an abstemious man. The engineer helped himself to a full chief's nip, three fingers measured at the knuckles, and smacked his lips anticipatorily.

"Towards us!" he husked, and swallowed the draught without a pause. Then he held out his smeared tumbler to the entering boy, who filled it with clear, icy water, to serve as a chaser.

"Try one yersel'?" he invited, but Hallam shook his head. Owning all a sailor's proverbial generosity, the captain refused his own liquor, because he had a queer belief that all the working day was his employer's property and that it was his manifest duty to give faithful service. After the ship's work was done he might indulge in a modest dram, not until. He had an exaggerated sense of duty, this small, insignificant man who didn't look like a sailor so much as a lay preacher of some dissenting sect noted for its meekness.

"Well, man Captain, it's your own loss," said Macgregor, and tipped out another measure. Over this he was prepared to dally in friendly converse, discussing the happenings of the day as they affected the destinies of the *Lamplough*, especially her engine room. "Twel' hundred Chinks, eh? The ship'll be hoatchin' like a louse-trap!" It was not elegantly put; but Renfrew fitters are not past-masters in elegance. They are only efficient at their chosen job.

"They'll be all right," said Hallam; "so long—" he glanced sidelong at the aneroid—"as it keeps fine. It's not much over a thousand miles to Chita-Lula—twelve-fifty to be exact—four days' steaming. They've been called for in a hurry, Mr. Pi Sang tells me." Hallam was probably the only white man in the locality who gave his owner the courtesy of a "Mister." Others called him "Old Pi Sang" or "Blasted Chink" or such other name as came most convenient; but all admitted him to be a sahib meticulously honorable in his dealings, paying a handsomer wage than his white competitors on the coast, and rather proud to find that white men would serve him. But Pi Sang, the Chinese shipowner, was Hallam's boss, deserving of respect, no matter what the color of his skin.

"Must be a big hurry if they can't wait for the *Chowloon*," said Macgregor.

"She's had to put into Shanghai with a burst circulating pump," said Hallam. "I got the news ashore—just through. She'll be held up a week, maybe more."

The chief slapped his greasy thigh, laughed harshly.

"Yon Drummond—too much Navy-Navy about him; always fleetin' about wi' women passengers 'stead of tendin' his job!" he exulted. "His cirrculatin' pump burrst, ye say? Aha! He's frae the Leith shops whaur they putty an' paint tae cover the rents.

"And we've got to take these—passengers." The thrift of his race spoke in Macgregor's next words. "We draw the passenger allowance, I doot?"

"We get everything we're entitled to, Chief. Mr. Pi Sang made that quite clear. Not that I see there's any reason to pay a man extra for—well, just doing his duty, eh?"

Macgregor snorted over his tumbler rim. Duty was all very well, but extra pay was something you could see and handle and send back to the always hungry family on the Clyde.

"I—I hope we'll have no burst circulating pumps," said Hallam. "If twelve hundred Chinamen took it into their heads to panic—phew!"

Macgregor slammed a huge and scoriated fist on the table until the whisky bottle threatened to capsize.

"There'll be no panic here aboard!" he averred. "Not on my blame, anyways. I did na learrn my job in Leith. Renfrew trained me."

"I will say this, Chief; I've never sailed shipmates with a better man at his work than you," said Captain Hallam.

"Aye, an' ye never will," was the modest rejoinder. "Did ye hear aught fresh ashore, Captain Hallam?" There was no news, it transpired. Things were very quiet everywhere. The two men were thrown back on ship talk. Macgregor mentioned that the temperature in the engine room was one hundred and thirty-five; and that if you drank a gallon of water it simply trickled through your pores without pausing on the way. A Chinese fireman had gone down with fireman's colic; and had been dosed with ginger and Worcester sauce in time-honored fashion. And the cover of the intermediate cylinder had been satisfactorily lifted for the fitting of new packing rings. It was trivial stuff enough, but it was their life's work, and so, interesting.

"Ay, it's hot," said the chief self-pityingly, his eyes on the whisky.

"Unnatural. Weather-breeder sort of day, if I know anything. There's been an earthquake in Tilbo-Tila."

"There's always earrthquakes thereaboots. Will ye not join me in just a small one?"

"Later on, perhaps." Hallam drummed on the table with his fingers. "I wish we'd a white man for mate," he mentioned. Obviously, whatever he had talked about, his mind was on the forthcoming passengers.

"Aye, he's got a soft bit in his spinal column, Pereixa," agreed the engineer, absent-mindedly helping himself to the spirits.

"You never know where you are with a crowd of Chinks—the coolie type, that is. If they cut loose they might play merry hell. The smallest thing frets 'em. And we're not a big enough ship for a crowd like that to get funny in."

"Count on me, Captain. A bit sprayin' wi' a steam hose. Ay, it's miraculous! Pereixa, now, he'll talk pistols an' machine guns; but gi'e me an armored hose wi' a twa hunnerd poond pressure an' ye can keep yer Maxims."

THEY discussed historical risings on the part of congested passengers. They betrayed no evidences of timidity although they would presently be required to keep control of twelve hundred human beings under any circumstances whatever. They could hardly count on any help beyond themselves. The *Lamplough* carried a second mate; but he was unworthy a second thought, a gross, slow moving English wastrel who habitually got drunk whenever the weather worsened. How he got his liquor was a mystery; Hallam systematically cut off supplies when the ship was at sea; but Osborne secured the means for intoxication none the less. He had been collected from the Chinese beach, where he had, to a certain extent, gone native; and he knew certain tricks that caused the Celestials to obey him. Some member of the crew supplied him with the rotgut stuff that his diseased stomach-membranes clamored for.

"If another white man happens along before we sail, I'll feel inclined to boot out Osborne and sign him on instead, even if he's only a gardener," said Hallam.

"White men are not that common here in Hanglau; an' I don't blame 'em. Well, I'll awa' below, Captain."

He made his reluctant exit. In port he enjoyed his dram; but once the steam was loosed into the engines that were his second self to him, he religiously abstained from all intoxicants.

Captain Hallam wiped his beaded forehead. The electric fan in his cabin gave no real coolness; it merely agitated stale, superheated air. There being nothing immediately to do he lit a cigar and puffed meditatively; then he fetched writing paper and materials from a drawer in his table and composed himself to add a fresh page to the serial letter he sent by every mail to his patient wife at home.

He wanted to see her again, he mentioned; he was almost forgetting what she looked like. But before so long, he had an idea, the *Lamplough* might be ordered to Europe, for a general overhaul, beyond the capacity of the Chinese coast dockyards. And when that happy event came along he intended, he said, to move heaven and earth and his Celestial owner, to give him permission to bring Mrs. Hallam aboard permanently. Not that a ship was much of a home for a woman—there was discomfort and loneliness; and he hated the thought of separating her from her friends at home; but—well, it seemed a long time since he'd set eyes on her; and although the pay on the Coast was good, and although it was hardly likely he'd have been lucky enough to secure a command of this value trading from a home port, money wasn't everything.

It wasn't much of a letter, and certain of the words were misspelled; the phraseology might have been bettered and there were repetitions; but it sufficed to bring slow, pained tears to a patient woman's eyes at a later date. For simple, abiding affection is not always expressed in actual words. It can breathe a definite message through even an illiterate scrawl.

"We're getting a sort of a lift up in the scale," he mentioned. *"Carrying passengers—a lot. I'll have to be thinking of buying myself a proper uniform if this sort of thing goes on. I hope I'll be able to deliver them safe; but I don't see any reason why I shouldn't. The Lamplough's a good ship—a fine seaboat, as I've told you before, although she is treacled up with a lot of fancy fittings and gold-leaf. And I will say this, that Mr. Pi Sang is a gentleman worth working for. It's a pleasure to do one's duty for him—he's so appreciative. I've seen white owners . . ."*

And so on. He wrote as he talked, soberly and honestly, with no trimmings and no equivocations.

Then he went along to see how the work in the 'tweendecks progressed. He wanted his ship to be clean, because if plague happened aboard with that congestion, the prospect wouldn't bear thinking of. And he was responsible for that cleanliness, as he was responsible for everything that transpired aboard, although certain duties were delegated to subordinates. He found Pereixa lazily supervising the slack-moving work that ensues on indifferent management; and snapped out a sulphurous curse or two—though mildly—that seemed to charge the native crew with electric energy. Although he would have passed without a second glance in any trifling country town's streets, here on the *Lamplough* he was dynamic, paramount, exhaling something that would only be personal magnetism. He was totally unaware of the possession of this force; but Pi Sang, the Chinese merchant, had offered him command of the ship without an instant's hesitation when he presented himself.

"I wish," he said, as he moved away from the hatchways, his shoulders drooped and his eyes watching his own feet, "that I'd a mate I could really trust."

II

NO POSSIBLE successor to Pereixa turned up during the following days; and when the *Lamplough* cleared for open water at her appointed time, laden to her marks with freight, and carrying in all thirteen hundred and forty coolies—for a fresh demand for labor had arrived meanwhile—Captain Hallam was well aware that the load on his shoulders would be lightened by no other man sharing the load. Macgregor below, himself on deck—there you had the brains and nerves of the ship. He scanned the packed foredeck. Humanity was thronging it from bulwark to bulwark. He turned his gaze outboard to a sea that still continued sleek and brooding as filmed lead; and he thought of the threat of the aneroid in his cabin. Still, the *Lamplough* was a good ship—hadn't he proved her worth a hundred times?

He entered into conversation with the exquisitely polite native pilot, trying to secure from him an estimation of what weather might be expected during the ensuing days of the passage to Chita-Lula. There was something behind this unnatural brooding closeness; as if nature were holding her breath in expectation of some Titanic cataclysm. Every so often, regularly, the sleek surface of the water gave a little heave, as if some monster underneath were indulging in occasional sarcastic chuckles. The dense air carried sounds with preternatural clarity: the chattering of the people aboard a native craft half a mile away could distinctly be heard. The whine of a block-sheaf was almost a yell.

But the politeness of the pilot, an old man whose face might have been carved in antique ivory, prevented him from presaging anything but excellent weather. It was nothing; a thunderstorm was brewing, perhaps; the overcharged heavens would discharge themselves in lightning and rain; but the excellent captain need not concern himself in his honorable splendor.

"If he'd heave out a bit less politeness and a bit more truth," meditated Hallam, "it might be worth while." And in a way, although his sense of lonely aloofness grew, he was glad when it became necessary to stop the *Lamplough* at the stick-buoy which marked the limit of the dredged channel, and discharge the Celestial conductor. He dashed him the customary gift, and told the steward to cast a chunk of salt pork into the clumsy boat that was awaiting, conforming in all respects with the customs of the sea; then, when all was clear, he rang the telegraph to full speed ahead, and summoned Pereixa from his station on the forecastle head.

"You look after her here," he ordered. "I'm going down to see those Chinks are properly looked after." Now, among those thirteen hundred odd men, women and children, recruited from God knew where, but conceivably from the marshlands south of the port, it was possible there were pirates, bandits and cutthroats of every type. But it never entered Hallam's head to arm himself prior to descending among them. Pereixa, per contra, had his pockets bulging with shooting irons, and carried himself as if immediately expecting an explosion. Hallam, on the foredeck, singled out a headman—a rawboned giant of a cultivator, with the visage of a murderer—and gave him greeting in a *lingua franca* that was understandable. In company with this man he moved to and fro, scrutinizing his human cargo. Occasionally he picked up a solemn faced infant and petted it. It was the abiding sorrow of his life that Mrs. Hallam was childless.

His eyes missed nothing. He saw one man drinking from a chatty, and an acrid odor reached his nostrils. He set down the immediate infant of his attention, and picking the chatty from the man's hand, sniffed at its mouth. It was, as he knew, a raw spirit distilled from rice, and its effect on the Celestial temperament was to render men into raving maniacs. He pitched the vessel overboard without so much as an apology.

"None of that," he mentioned to the headman. "Any more of that stuff aboard?"

And somehow the headman looked at him as if with added interest; and when he answered his voice had acquired a subtle deference. He barked sharply to the recalcitrant, threatening him with unspeakable punishment if he transgressed again; and the man stopped fingering the metal-bound bamboo that in his expert hands might easily become a terrible weapon of offence. Captain Hallam went below to the cleared 'tweendecks. A choking odor of unwashed humanity assailed him. The majority of the women passengers were settling down in their new quarters: making arrangements for some sort of privacy, staking out claims by means of camphor-wood chests and bundles tied up in raw blue jean. Being women they bickered; voices were raised shrilly; and Hallam shrugged patient shoulders.

"Women are the devil, aren't they?" he asked the headman, who replied with an unprintable comment on the sex. Hallam interposed between two females who were on the edge of personal violence; arbitrated gently; and changed scowls to smiles. One woman invited his inspection of a puling child.

"Tell her to bring it along aft, eh? I've got a medicine chest there. Ship's doctor, amongst other things, I am," said Hallam. Had the *Lamplough* flown any but the Chinese flag she must necessarily have carried a qualified surgeon; as it was, the extra burden rested on the captain's shoulders; and he was in nowise perturbed. He applied common sense to medical problems as to nautical. Sometimes his remedies were heroic. He knew the blue book of medical directions by heart; and sometimes thought that if his lines had been cast in more fortunate places, he would have liked to be a doctor.

DISCOVERING scamped work in the course of his tour, he made a mental note to haul the mate over the coals. He inspected the cooking quarters and personally tasted the meal that was in preparation. He gave explicit instructions to the headman as to his conception of cleanliness. Certain simple regulations must be rigidly adhered to in the interests of the many. Slackness would not be overlooked.

It was rather curious to see how the air of command sat upon this little modest man, who did not belong to the accepted ruling caste. His father had been a servant and his mother a shop girl; mere work-slaves. Hallam himself had bolted from home as a barefooted boy and stowed away aboard a coastwise collier. What he was the sea had made him. In many respects it had made a good job of him. He ordered, he didn't ask; and he appeared to expect his orders to be immediately obeyed.

When he emerged from the 'tweendecks, he was drenched with sweat. The stenchful closeness below seemed to have drained vitality from his system. He bared his head of the peaked cap he affected when at sea, and inhaled deeply. The air was unrefreshing and stagnant. It seemed to demand overtime working on the part of his lungs. It occurred to him that, considering one thing and another, he might have been wiser not to leave port that day. And yet this sultry, breathless day was but another of the many; and it was his task to go to sea irrespective of weather conditions.

He paced to the bridge, where the ship's movement through the water created a stirring of the vitiated air.

"Where's the second mate?" he demanded of Pereixa, who, bred amongst siroccos, was limp as a fireman's sweatcloth.

Pereixa shrugged his shoulders; his hands went out into the familiar protesting gesture.

"Drunk again?"

Again the shrug and the raised eyeballs.

"Not fit for ballast!" expressed Hallam, and trudged below. The second mate presented an unpleasing spectacle, sprawled loosely on his littered settee. His face was swollen, purple blotched, the mouth open and saliva dripping down his jowl. The cabin was reeking with the stench of the potent rice spirit, acrid and nauseating, like the scent of wood alcohol. For once Captain Hallam's patient temper got the better of him. Ranged along the alleyway were red-painted fire buckets, filled to the brim. He emptied the first two over the snoring form, swinging the water with a true boatswain's hurl.

"My God! Save th'others—I c'n swim!" growled the second mate, floundering.

"I'll swim you!" The little man laid hands to the sodden bulk and dragged it to the swimming deck. He hauled it out into the open and propped it against the bulkhead of the superstructure.

The tense condition of the atmosphere must have accounted for the fraying of Hallam's nerves. He asked no aid from living man; but he unrolled a length of fire hose and linked it with the bayonet joint to the wash-deck pipe. He signaled for water, and when it came directed a hard driven stream from the battered copper nozzle full into the second mate's face. It thrust the officer sideways, Hallam tweaked him back with the stream. He drove solid water with the force of a battering ram into the man's midriff until he vomited.

"I'll sober you or smash you!" he grunted. But his manner was not malevolent. He was curiously patient: as if making every allowance for human weaknesses. As offset to the ample pay and excellent living conditions of his service were drawbacks: the need to put up with such human offal as was available. Presently the second mate was limply bemoaning the hardships of life, and tearfully penitent. That presaged, Hallam knew, a further sottish indulgence so long as supplies were available. He left the chastened man where he was, turned off the hose, and descending, searched his cabin. For once the officer had omitted to conceal his supplies—there was a false bottom in his settee locker. Hallam hoisted out various vessels and hove them through the open port.

When he reached the deck again he found his chief engineer licking reminiscent lips. The engines now working, Macgregor would persist in abstemiousness, whatever the mental suffering involved. Something might happen to his worshipped "job" if he lapsed.

"Have ye ever thought," he asked, wiping his hands on waste, "what like a panic'd be, an the Chinks took fright?"

"Yes. Oh, yes. I've pictured that sort of thing happening, Chief. It's like nightmares. If anything happened below in a bit of weather——"

"Ye can trust the engines as ye'd trust your wife, man Captain."

"Well, if we hit anything, say—phew! Still, it's no use meeting trouble halfway, is it?" He gazed contemplatively out over that leaden sea. He had spent the years of his manhood in endeavoring to master the hidden possibilities of blue water; and he knew that an entire lifetime could never put him wise to all its tricks and treacheries. All he could do was to use his God-given wits to the best of his ability, and try to find out what the sea meant to do a little while before it did it.

"Wish it would breeze up or clear or do something," he said. Anything was better than this increasing atmosphere of suspense. He was a man who liked to be in action when something could be done besides tedious thinking that led a man nowhere when the actual emergency came. But for fifty-six hours the *Lamplough* trudged an untroubled way across those sleek floors, where the hiss and splash and gurgle of the white water under her forefoot sounded startlingly in the brooding silence.

III

"GET the last mother's son of them below and batten them down," said Captain Hallem nervously to Mr. Pereixa. "When that's done, lash everything, and wedge it off, see?"

"It is calm as summer!" the mate protested. He disliked added work at sunset time. It was the moment for lazy sentiment and dreams of Strada Reale and the tinkling mandolins down by Valetta Harbor, where the snappy cries of the *dghaisa* men sounded like whipcracks.

"Get busy! We're in for something big—bigger than we've seen yet. Get busy."

"I feela a leetla seek," said Pereixa. "I tinks I getta small fever."

"You'll get a large fever if you don't look alive! Listen here, Mister. If I find you scrimshanking I'll—I'll—smallock you!" What "smallock" meant Hallam did not know, but it sounded ominous enough to terrify. Pereixa belonged to a furtive race that could always slink away from combat on pretence of human weakness. But he, too, dreaded being smallocked; and he moved away. The weather was, if possible, even more oppressive than it had been since the *Lamplough* left her port. The brooding sky showed patches not of heartening blue but of livid steeliness. The sleek sea surface was not troubled by a definite swell, but every so often it heaved spasmodically; for all the world as if some submarine monster had taken an unexpected breath.

"Anyway she's a good ship, and a fine fool I'd have looked sneaking back to port with no gale breaking all this time!" said Hallam, rubbing his hands with a rasping sound. He watched Pereixa gather his satellites and commence to drive the coolies below deck. The mate's manner was not good—he affected the bully when he imagined he could get away with it. In the presence of superiors he was cowed and slavish, but the Chinks were, to his fancy, merely cattle on two legs.

"A hell of a mate!" said Hallam, not for the first time. "Seen better made out of a handful of tea leaves." There was some hint of delay down there, he noticed; the gigantic headman was protesting; a tight knot of humanity surrounded the expostulatory chief and the sputtering mate.

"What's the matter down there, Mister?" demanded Hallam through his cupped hands, although his whisper must have carried clearly enough.

"He say one man not go below, sah—seek!"

"Keep a lookout; blow the whistle if you see anything," the captain ordered the helmsman, and slithered down the scorching ladder. He forced a calm way through the press on the foredeck, urging the coolies to give way. His manner was patient, like that of an experienced nurse with reckless children. His white man's heritage taught him a queer contempt for yellowskins.

"How long's he been this way?" he asked, knowing a disposition to retch somewhat—to retch with actual fear. He had not studied the blue-bound volume of medical directions for nothing. He pushed back those who pressed nearest, and he dragged the cuffs of his jacket over his hands as he did so.

"He fall sick like dees all sudden," said Pereixa.

"Get these others below—pronto! He's got a touch of heat stroke, that's all, nothing to worry about. Leave him here. Down below, the rest." His heart was pulsing suffocatingly but it did not shake the little man's voice. He had recognized a case of virulent plague; and only God knew how many more had been infected with the terrible virus. It was incumbent on him to get the *Lamplough* to port as swiftly as was possible.

"Bear a hand here and carry him to the hospital," he said curtly to Pereixa. The mate hesitated; he had all his breed's dislike to touch a sick body.

"I tell the serang," he said.

"You'll do it yourself, or else—!" That power of command told. Shuddering Pereixa bore a hand; the writhing form was conveyed to the steel-walled cell under the forecastle which was prison and hospital together.

"Now, go wash yourself in strong carbolic—take a bath!" advised Hallam. "I'll look after her." Pereixa slunk away; the captain compelled the headman to force the passengers under cover. There were shrill, chattering protests against being immured in the close darkness of the 'tweendecks but Hallam deafened himself. Whatever discomfort might exist down there it was safe. Inside an hour white water might be devastating the *Lamplough's* decks; he wanted no broken limbs to tend, as he wanted no shortage in the human tally when the time came to render account of his stewardship.

"NOW, then, Chips!" he told the carpenter; and the hatch battens were laid and wedged. With his own hands he trimmed the extra ventilators so that every breath of air caused by the ship's motion should be forced down below to sweeten the enclosed spaces.

On the way to the bridge, after telling the serang and carpenter to shore and lash and wedge everything that was not an integral part of the fabric, he rapped first on the chief engineer's door, invited Macgregor to the bridge, and called in at his own cabin, where he fished the medical directions from the medicine chest. By the almost expended light he read the page devoted to infectious plagues. The sick man had many ominous symptoms. He had been in contact with many of the coolies; and the disease was highly dangerous. Macgregor appeared, always wiping his hands on a dingy sweat rag; sweat beading his furrowed forehead.

"You're not a coward, Chief," Hallam said crisply. "I reckon a man fights best when he knows what he's fighting, eh? See that?" He waved a hand to the seascape.

"It's like a Durer drawin' o' the Last Judgment," opined the engineer.

"It's like the nastiest typhoon you or I've ever beaten; and we're going to beat it. It's up to you and me mostly—and the ship. She's got to be kept going when it breaks. But there's something else—plague!"

"The de'il!"

"We've got a lot to do and not much time. I'll want you to help; it's outside your department, but the mate's no damn good. We'll have to isolate all those the sick man's been in contact with—no matter what they say. They'll object. It might mean parting families; but they've got to do as they're told, Chief."

"It's a condeetion," said Macgregor, "that almost warrants a man in breakin' a pledge—a self-imposed one at that." He smacked his lips.

"Liquoring won't help us; we've got to keep our brains on ice for the next twenty-four hours. As soon as the mate comes back to the bridge, you and I'll have to go below and sort 'em out. There's a watertight bulkhead between the for'ard 'tweendecks and the peak; that'll have to be our wall. But they might fight."

"Aye, they'll likely fight. An' there's no couplings for the steam hose down below."

"Boiling 'em to death won't help. Wish that Maltoot would look alive."

"Whaur's he gone, Captain?"

"I sent him to bathe in carbolic; he helped me handle that sick man."

"He'll be mair sanitary, I doubt. Not afore it's needed. Whaur's the second?"

"Liquored up again. God knows how! I broached his sea stock; but he's got more. For two pins I'd dump him overboard." The *Lamplough* suddenly writhed, plunged down the slope of a newly-open watery valley; lifted solid water over her forecastle head in a sleek cascade which broke into foam about the winches and deck gear; and then was herself again.

"Felt like a submarine disturbance," said Hallam. "A bit breathless, isn't it?"

"I wish something would break." That exactly expressed it. The atmosphere was taut as a harpstring under its severest strain. It seemed as if nothing could happen but an immediate snap of something—anything. The two men were panting as they breathed; endeavoring to fill their lungs with oxygen. Hallam felt his skin "pringling," as he described it, as if he were surcharged with electricity and required discharging.

"Something's going to break—hard." But the suspense grew, and was intensified by the time Pereixa, redolent of disinfectant, returned to take charge of the bridge.

"You look after her." There was a lot to do. Captain and engineer went below. Macgregor spared a moment to slide a seven-eighths spanner into the waistband of his drenched pants; but Hallam took no precaution of that kind. They entered the 'tweendecks by a scuttle giving on a private compartment devoted to storerooms. There was a watertight door between this space and the passenger quarters. Although the 'tweendecks had been emptied and aired throughout the day, the oppression and stench already were appalling. But the coolies were quiet. Hallam had told the headman to see to the hastening on of the evening meal—full-fed men forgot to cause trouble, according to his experience. Over their bowls of rice and curry the Chinese stared owlishly at the white intruders. There was subdued chattering; a woman was wailing wofully close to the ship's side.

AS BEST he could, Hallam made the headman understand what was required of him. All those who had lived adjacent to the sick man must convey themselves and their belongings to the isolation pen. There must be no hesitation or delay—"shanarniking" was the word the captain used. He saw a strange pallor steal under the headman's skin as perception began to dawn upon him. Then the giant claimed as a right that he should be transferred to lonely quarters where the infection could not reach him. It was due to his position. Otherwise, what benefits accrued from being appointed headman? He construed duty in a somewhat different fashion from Captain Hallam.

"We'll see, when you've done what I tell you," said the skipper patiently, though he felt anything but patient. Nothing would have pleased him better than to set about the big, sullen, self-seeking fellow, who was prepared to accept all the kudos of rank and none of its obligations. "Now, get busy with it."

One additional trouble was the reluctance of the natives to be broken up. They had already settled down into companionable coteries; little allegiances and hostilities had been formed. Painstakingly Hallam and Macgregor worked. If there showed signs of trouble, they bundled all concerned into the isolation pen. They stood no nonsense; and once or twice the engineer handled his spanner ominously. The cackling and chattering down below there was indescribable; everyone was expostulating at once. The headman's authority must have gone by the board, but that in some mysterious manner Hallam upheld it—personal magnetism again! Having segregated all who came under suspicion he issued disinfectants to the passengers and instructed them in their use. He saw they were beginning to grow afraid. Some idea of what was transpiring had penetrated to their minds. With the steel doors shut, the problem was not yet mastered; he proceeded to the medicine locker and mixed a large Winchester quart bottle of a patent compound—ginger and cardamoms and pepper for the most part—and, returning with it, insisted on dosing every suspect liberally. Having laced the decoction liberally with rum from his own private stores, he presently had the doctored ones complacently rubbing their tingling stomachs.

Satisfied that he had taken all precautions, he went back to the still breathless deck. Macgregor distributed the lees of the medicinal brew amongst his own gangs in the stokehold; since he had no intention of keeping Hallam short of steam when the fighting hour arrived, and climbed to the bridge to report on what he had done. Pereixa was complaining of feeling ill; his imagination was already pestering him with symptoms.

"You don't know how ill you will be, Mister Mate, if you chuck up the sponge just now," said Hallam. "Anyway, this plague doesn't attack white men, only Chinks." That was a lie and he knew it; but the mate was necessary to him, indifferent officer though he was.

"Mebbe it's goin' to be like the barber's cat—all threat an' no performance," opined the chief engineer; shredding sweating plug tobacco into his greasy palm, and observing the outlook. There was now nothing to see save an occasional phosphorescent shimmer on a waste of blackness overside. There were no stars; and the night had fallen solidly black, like invisible wool. The seethe and purl of the ship's progress through the water was infinitely noisier than usual on account of some sound-magnifying quality in the distorted atmosphere.

"We'll hope so, Chief; we'll hope so." Hallam was bathed in sweat that caused a fretful itch on his skin. His face, as disclosed by the wan light of the standard binnacle, was dripping and firmly set. Of a sudden Macgregor laughed encouragingly.

"Man Captain, I believe ye're enjoyin' this in your heart o' hearts!" he averred.

"Ive always sort of got to the top of my form in bad weather, Chief." They talked in modified voices, because the strange tautness of the night seemed to demand a suggestion of confidences. As they were talking the cabin steward clangingly rang the bell summoning them to supper. It rang like a tocsin; and the chief started at the first stroke.

"Firrst time I ever knew I owned a nerrve," he apologized. "It's uncanny, man Captain—that's it: uncanny! I canna call to mind shyin' at food afore. Well, we micht as well die full as fastin'. I'll awa' below." He was at all times a notable trencher-man, doing full justice to the excellent victuals provided by Mr. Pi Sang. He made his concession to the graces by donning a crumpled linen jacket that had once been white, prior to seating himself at table. But it was Pereixa who joined him at the board, not Hallam—the captain had sent the mate below. Whatever was coming was more than likely to come suddenly; and he wanted to be out in the open to meet its first onset.

"Tell the steward to bring me a bit of something up here," was the captain's mandate as he dispatched his subordinate below. And presently his own boy brought a tray, which Hallam placed on the navigation shelf in the bridge wing, and from which he ate occasional, tasteless mouthfuls. The scalding tea which he drank in large gulps, cooled him while it made him perspire with greater freedom. He maintained a constant beat from tray to chart room, where he studied the barometer; back by way of the wheelhouse, to scan the steady compass card. On an impulse he summoned the carpenter and instructed him to see to the safety of the steering rods. A loose nut at this juncture might conceivably spell disaster. He left nothing undone that human forethought could conceive. And when he permitted himself to think, which was as seldom as could be, he thought of his patient wife at home; because otherwise he might have weakened at the sheer immensity of the problems confronting him—plague infesting a ship on the edge of what promised to be the wildest typhoon ever known in those waters.

"I mustn't tell her about the plague when I write tonight's page to her," he decided. "She'll worry—forgetting that it'll all be over and done with long before she gets the letter."

IV

PEREIXA came back to the bridge, sucking his teeth, still redolent of disinfectants. He began to talk in a high head-voice, the half hysterical chatter of one who was mortally scared. As he brushed against the captain Hallam felt the weightiness of his jacket.

"What's that in your pockets—guns?" he demanded. There were pistols there; but also there were other matters, odds and ends of scrap iron, stowed away to render the matter of death by drowning more speedy. Pereixa lacked that excellent spirit which compels a man to fight until his last ounce of effort is expended, and then go on fighting. The line of least resistance for him, every time.

"Yessir, I gotta peestols," he declared.

"Bah; you couldn't shoot a man if you tried!" said Hallam.

"S-st--st!"

It was a preternaturally vivid flash of lightning that split the obscured firmament; commencing at the zenith and slowly descending to a suddenly revealed and muddy horizon. Not ordinary lightning, this. It lingered, leaving a queer sulphurous odor in its reluctant passing. The spirit of the pending storm was throwing out its Verey Lights that the battleground might be exposed. For counted seconds the impression of that flash remained on the startled eyeballs. The *Lamplough* was amazingly revealed in intimate detail, gaunt and stripped, unearthly white, trudging steadfastly across the illuminated floors. The flat face of the lookout man showed, his eyes distended, his whole figure cowering back. Then the darkness fell again, and Hallam rubbed his eyeballs, certain that he had been blinded. He stumbled towards the standard compass, drew a breath of relief when he was able to see the slightly oscillant card under the illuminated hood. Pereixa shrunk back under the canvas weather cloth, whimpering and sobbing.

"Hope she's not been struck," was Captain Hallam's practical thought. He did not indulge in fantastic imagery. A few splashing drops of rain fell ploppingly, but there was no definite downpour.

"First the rain, then the wind!" That meant a sanakatowzer of a blow in all probability. He held up his face to the shower and found it tepid and stale; the water he licked from his lips was lifeless and flat.

"Won't be long, now," he told Pereixa. "Sooner the better!"

Pereixa's teeth were chattering. He had always been afraid of lightning; taught to be by the myriad priests who had controlled his years of adolescence. It was evidence of Heavenly anger and as such to be dreaded wholesomely. Another lurid flash hung pendent in the night, dissolved in eerie forkings, leaving a pronounced suggestion of sulphur in its wake. The resultant thunder sounded a little nearer, but not much.

The *Lamplough*, as black thick night close in on her, seemed to halt momentarily in her even stride and give a queer little sick lurch. It was nothing more than if she had missed a stroke of her screw; but it was startlingly noticeable in the suspenseful atmosphere. Hallam's immediate thought was that she had hit something: a slinking chunk of derelict wreckage that had the power to rip open her paper-thin plates and send her swirling to the Locker three thousand fathom down. He had once been implicated in a catastrophe of that kind, which resulted in the quick sinking of the riven ship.

"Ask them in the engine room if she's making water," he said. He felt that he was speaking muffledly, through much cotton wool. Pereixa's voice at the old-fashioned speaking tube was high-pitched and inclined to break. Before he obtained an answer the *Lamplough* jolted again, so it couldn't be wreckage. Something happening underseas, Hallam thought.

"Not making water," reported the mate.

"Aye, aye—tell 'em to stand by; it's coming soon." If it did come it would be from that point of the horizon where the lightning was brightest, he decided. He instructed the helmsman to head up towards that point; and as the ship's bow came round, the first rush of the typhoon was on her—fairly on her broadside, thrusting her over solidly. It wasn't a blow and a pause; it was a merciless thrust that increased in violence as it continued; a sheer, unbeatable weight that was crushing.

A further lightning flash showed Hallam the *Lamplough* careening stiffly away, protestingly. She planed solid water over her lee bulwarks; the sea seemed to rise and tower—as high as the bridge, higher still. Then with a muffled, drumming drone the full fury of the typhoon broke.

Sheer weight of wind swept away the weather boats from their chocks and whirled them inboard in their tackles. One was pounded to splinters against the engine room superstructure in an instant. The lightning flash showed it crumple like a kicked and rotten basket. Hallam warped himself across a deck slanted at a perilous angle and entered the wheelhouse.

"Head her into it," he roared, but though his mouth was alongside the man's ear, nothing was audible, for the combination of sounds in the wheelhouse was incredible. The man indicated by signs that the wheel was hard down, that the ship refused to answer. His teeth were chattering like castanets, and the trivial binnacle light revealed his face, clay-green under its normal yellow. A good man, too, one of the best, selected for quartermaster because of his trick with a ship.

"Get the hands aft and haul out that trysail!" Hallam burst from the wheelhouse like a shell, expecting to find the mate at the speaking tube where he had left him. But Pereixa was not there. The wind gust had lifted him bodily to leeward, flattening him against the rails. A torn dodger flapped noisily before it ripped itself clear of its holdings and flashed across the bridge to vanish. Hallam caught a grip on the engine room telegraph and clung. It demanded the effort of all his strength to maintain a hold; he was required to fight like a maniac to remain in position. He yelled for the mate but the wind mocked him, cramming his voice down his gasping throat.

A momentary sensation of loneliness troubled him. It passed. Being master of the ship he was normally a lonely man, accustomed to rely entirely on himself in every emergency. For the time being Pereixa ceased to exist. He had to see this job through by himself.

"Got to do something!" he thought, and made for the wheelhouse again. He was taken up and hurled against the lee rails, flattened there helplessly. The steel rods caused excruciating aches to travel through his frame. He dropped flat on the deck and the wind tried to scoop him up and throw him overboard; but he lay flaccid, offering no resistance, until he began to crawl, inch by tedious inch, up the slope of the planking, where water was already streaming. He was flung back, but he persevered. The brain of the ship mustn't be lost. He'd got to reach the wheelhouse before the ship foundered. He had to.

There was a smashing of heavy timber as he decided on this. Something hurtled past his head—the wheelhouse must have collapsed. A human body was precipitated upon him, he vaguely heard a startled howl, and cursing, pulled himself clear Whether the shock had quickened his energy or not, he couldn't tell, but somehow he found himself clinging to the sill of the wheelhouse door; the wind hurling strongly as ever. Of course, the wheelhouse had gone, crumpled like a house of cards. But he contrived to reach the wheel standard and hove himself up by its aid.

If the wreckage of the house had touched the steam gear and rendered it useless he was quite certain no human power could drag the *Lamplough* from the threatened ruin. The wheel was hard down. He moved the spokes, fetching his breath in choking gasps, because the wind pressure beat his lungs, and eased the jammed rudder. Fortunately the steering gear was unharmed; the soft *wheep-wheep* of the pistons reached his ears through the savage drive of startled air.

THE knowledge of an enormous loneliness descended on Captain Hallam. There was not a living thing on whom to rely save himself, and—yes—the engineer below. Mac wouldn't fail him; he'd keep those engines going until the furnaces were drowned out; for Mac was a dogged, implacable fighter, unbeatable.

The *Lamplough* began to shiver. He eased the helm a spoke or two more, feeling the ship's temper, gauging her fighting quality. She was a good ship, built by honest workmen; and though past her youth, was mellowed and merged and resilient. Her inherent weaknesses had long ago been discovered and adjusted or studied.

As she fell away a little more, the pulsing of her engines appeared to increase. She was gathering power for the forthcoming advance into the storm's eye. Hallam waited, panting always, until he deemed the moment opportune, then eased down his helm again. The drive of spindrift, level and heavy, almost staggered him, but he turned his back to it, staring askance at the still lighted compass bowl, watching the swaying lubber's line. The *Lamplough*, shivering through her length, came up a little—an extra ferocious rush of wind hurled her back. She wallowed, and an unseen but apprehended wave piled high to windward. It fell; and where had been the ship was for a while nothing but confused, curdled foam, with the funnel and bridge showing above it, clearly revealed in another lightning flash. The ship grew leadenly heavy and inert.

"If her hatches go—!" Hallam thought confusedly. They were stout hatches, efficiently braced with strong-backs and beams, and cambered to add to their water resisting powers; but all the same they were not constructed to withstand the weight of half the Pacific Ocean, which appeared to have come aboard in one weltering rush.

V

THE *Lamplough* surged upwards a little, fell back, recovered; then shook herself and the dead inertia that was transmitted to Hallam's senses through the wheel spokes eased. The hatches had stood the strain. That was so much to the good. He recognized that, whatever the battle might be, he had been furnished with worthy fighting tools; and that knowledge heartens a man.

For what might have been five minutes or fifty, time being suspended, Hallam humored the ship, letting her take her own time and make her own fighting preparation. She was sea wise, he believed. By no means imaginative, and certainly not consciously sentimental, he believed that ships possessed sentient souls. That they were mere conglomerates of steel and timber and wire he wouldn't accept. The men who labored on the great hulls built something of themselves into the fabrics. Several times he felt her mood, lifting her delicately towards the wind. When he realized that the moment was not yet, he allowed her to fall back.

There came another torrential welter of devastating water. The lightning showed it towering like a castle wall, with an evil fringe of yellow-white foam. And again the *Lamplough* vanished from view under the cascade. The thin snappings and screeches that beat through the thunderous drone Hallam named for his boats smashing to kindlings. But boats didn't matter; in any case they couldn't have held one quarter the people; and they couldn't live an instant apart from their parent ship. So long as he dragged the bare, stripped hull from the astounding mêlée he would be more than content.

For an instant, after a numb period of waiting, it seemed to him the ship was inhaling a deep, purposeful breath; at the same instant the ferocity of the wind appeared to lessen. He had been waiting for this combination.

"Now, then, you old cow!" he said, and eased down another spoke. The *Lamplough* immediately wakened to life, and became the attacker. Her bow swung through a definite arc and then fell back—but not quite back to the former point. She'd gained a dozen degrees before the wind developed its old, indeed, an added fury. Hallam slapped the wheel standard in congratulation. He eased down another spoke, after allowing the ship to get her breath, and she came up still a little more.

It was very dark, and he wished he could see what he was up against. Then again he wondered if it wasn't better to be ignorant of the true conditions, lest he grow appalled by their very enormity. For all evidence to the contrary, save in the lessening lightning flashes, there might have been nothing in all the world beyond himself and the wheel, this latter attached to something vague and nebulous, and the unparalleled storm. He had the emotions of a soul adrift on the morning of first creation. That terrible, clogging loneliness increased. He wanted to whimper. Curiously he thought of his mother, and remembered how, frightened as a child, he had crept into the warm shelter of her arms. Some such havenage would have been very pleasant at this juncture. Then, naturally, from his mother, his thoughts ran to his wife. With a pang of compunction he realized that he had omitted to write his customary page in the serial letter.

Thought of Mrs. Hallam heartened him, however. She considered him a good sailor; and he couldn't disappoint her. She expected him to do his best. If he failed in his duty now his hope of getting her out to the Coast was dead. The danger to himself didn't enter into the reckoning. The possible disappointment for his wife mattered a great deal.

"All right," he mumbled into his dripping beard, as though replying to a definite question as to his ability to endure. "All right; we'll keep going!"

He resumed his tactics. His one big determination was to notch the *Lamplough's* bow into the eye of the storm; once that was done it might be possible to fetch a breath in relief and consider details beyond the mere continued existence of the ship. There were, he felt, dozens of things to think of. He wondered what the coolies were thinking of it all—whether they were scared. For all evidence to the contrary they might be fighting like Kilkenny cats below, in a madness of panic fear.

"Wonder if that plague's nipped any more," he meditated.

He brought the ship's bow another ten degrees nearer the wind, and a sea crashed down on the foredeck, to shake the bridge stanchions alarmingly. Remembering something he fumbled for his whistle, but failed to find it. He reached, then, for the lanyard of the steam siren; but that had carried away. He yelled—the wind mocked him. He stamped on the deck—why the devil didn't someone come? He was captain of the ship, and for all the evidence, he might have been an unconsidered stowaway. He must tell the mate to get the cargo derricks down and lashed over those fore hatches to break the initial weight of water as it lashed down. Once let the fore hatches go and the ship was scuppered. The placing of those derricks became the most vital detail of all.

"I'll fire Pereixa the minute we drop the hook!" he thought. "Damned Maltoot!"

THE *Lamplough* commenced to roll as she came up a little more, angling the seas. Previously the weight of wind on her upper part had borne her down until her lee rail was awash; but now the wind hadn't so much surface to bite on. She rolled savagely, swinging her masts across an enormous arc of the sky. But as she rolled she clawed another degree, and then another, and another, towards the wind, and presently grew steadier. But her antics seemed to have loosened Hallam's teeth in their sockets.

Still humoring her, he grew conscious of some other presence on the bridge near him, and shouted. The words, hurled back into his gaping throat, well nigh choked him. He reached out a searching foot, screaming again; and—the foot was seized by someone who clung limpetwise, using the member as a grip by which to haul himself nearer.

"You—Mister Mate!"

"Hoo aboot a wee dram?" sounded Macgregor's voice, accompanied by a waft of heated oil. The engineer had an arm braced about Hallam's shoulder. How he had gained the deck from below even he could not have told. He'd got there, somehow, probably realizing in his understanding soul, how dire was the captain's need for companionship. Down below he'd seen his greasers moving about and his juniors; he'd gained no real conception of the frightfulness on deck, for the engine room was immune from the wind onslaught. True enough, he'd seen a greaser thrown into the intermediate crank pit and pounded into bloody pulp before his death scream vied with the roar of machinery. But that was an accident he'd witnessed before and it didn't impress him unduly. Below he was warm and dry, save for the inevitable sweat, and the occasional water that leaked through the skylight; but as he tended his pets in masterly fashion, he'd spared time to think of that game wee fellow, the skipper.

"Mac—God bless you, damn your eyes!" gulped Hallam.

"It's blawin' abune a bit! Whaur's yer men?"

"God knows! What time is it?"

"Two o'clock aboot."

"That all? Four hours to daylight! How's everything below?"

"Sweet as a nut—mon, she's a bonny job. A wee dram, noo—?"

"No. We've to see it through sober. Have you been in the 'tweendecks?"

"I've not. There's hell bruken loose yonder. Sic a screechin' an' caterwaulin' ye never heard. They puir buddies think the end o' the warld's come upon them."

"Maybe they're not far wrong."

"Did ever I tell ye yon yarn aboot—?" He related a Rabelaisan anecdote that is unprintable. Hallam failed to see its point; didn't listen for it, indeed, but it was comforting to realize another human presence in his loneliness. The pressure of the chief's arm about his shoulders was strangely like the comfort of his mother's embrace. He mentally decided that when this bobbery was over Mac should have an entire bottle of whisky to himself, if he so desired it.

"I'd best get belaw, man Captain!" howled the chief.

"Find the mate—someone! Anyone—must have someone—you understand."

"Aye. Wait!" He was absent an unconscionable time—to Hallam it seemed as if he must have been carried overboard by one of the many seas that crashingly fell—but when he reappeared he was burdened. The clatter of his brogued feet on the brass plates of the ladder steps heralded his approach. He shot something down on the deck; something that was blown against Hallam's legs. Two arms encircled him.

"The second mate—all I can find," yelled Macgregor. "Blind fu'! He's lucky!"

Hallam kicked at the useless mass of flesh which the chief had carried like a sack from the guarded cabins; and whilst he kicked, another wave towered up above the bridge and fell. When its swirls had cleared there was no weight against his legs. He thought to hear someone gasping and spluttering. Once again the chief's arm wound round him like the tentacle of an octopus.

"It near had me," spat Macgregor. "Near's damn it is to swearin'. I canna find the mate."

"All right—can't be helped." He would have liked to hand over the wheel to the engineer and gone down to the hell of the foredeck in person, there to hound out the deckhands and turn them to at that very necessary task of lashing the derricks down over the menaced fore hatches; but notwithstanding his friendship for the mechanic he owned all the deck's contempt for the engine room in matters of seamanship. Anyhow, if anything happened in his absence, he would never be able to forgive himself. It did not enter his mind that if anything happened he wouldn't need to forgive himself at all.

"Once she comes up I'll have a look round," he shouted. "If you can spare a minute, look after those passengers, eh?"

"Aye, aye. I'll keep mind o't. Sure ye'd no like a dram?"

"Get one yourself, if you feel that way. Don't overdo it. You and I've got to pull her out of this, Chief!"

"They couldna have twa better men. I'll awa' then!" The chief's Doric was always broadest when he was most keyed up. He faded away, but left behind a heartening sense of companionship that buoyed Hallam up amazingly. All the same, he hoped Mac wouldn't interpret his offer of refreshment too literally. If once the engines faltered the *Lamplough* was finished. As it happened, when the chief attempted to enter the captain's cabin, a greybearded wave enveloped him, tore him from his hold on the life rail, and carried him along the bridge deck, until he grasped the coaming of the engine room doorway. Being there he philosophically hauled himself into the hot, oily stench, and forgot all about alcohol, because he thought to see a red hot bearing down below.

VI

YELLOW and lurid the dawn broke, high above a coal black immensity of venomous storm cloud. A high dawn meant more wind, Hallam knew; he stared at the suggested lightening of the sky, literally afraid to bring his gaze down to the ship and the sea. He had prayed and ached for daylight; now, when it was imminent, he wished the darkness would continue until the struggle was done —one way or another. None the less, he was getting his second wind. Ever since the chief's visit to the bridge, he had realized hopefulness.

The day waxed into the livid twilight that would be all the day there was; and Hallam, fetching gusty breaths, looked at the sea. He had never witnessed anything in all his days like that piled, frenzied medley of demoniacal water, rising and reaching skywards, falling, foam swirls spreading over the hollows, the crests clipped off and hurled all-whither in spindrift. The *Lamplough* lifted herself, squattering and cascading white water, from a deep trough into which she had plunged. She seemed infinitely trivial in the waste—ludicrously, blasphemously so, indeed. That such a miniature fabric should dare to combat the loosened powers of high Heaven seemed incredible.

None of these thoughts troubled Captain Hallam as he eyed her over. He was searching for damage done, nosing out the weak spots in his armor. At first appearance the ship showed a stripped wreck. Havoc had been done during those black, clamorous hours. Every ventilator on the forecastle head was snapped off carrotwise save one—that airing the chain-locker, and that was flattened and concertina-ed. The spare bower anchor, chain-lashed at the forecastle break, had been snatched from its moorings, hurled through the guard rails, and now lay on the fore hatch—and it weighed all of five tons.

Solid sprays whirled over the gaunt rails whence the weather cloths had been stripped, and sluiced yeastily across the planking. The gratings were afloat, washed here and there negligently. Looking, he saw the sodden body of the second mate—it hung across the middle rail abreast the wheel, saved from being hurled overboard by that rail alone. It sagged and bowed to every uneasy movement of the ship. Its face and feet were turned outboard. Of the mate there was no sign, nor yet of the helmsman. There was a gap in the lee rail that might have served as a gateway for the two men to pass into the Beyond.

His face sticky with driven salt, Captain Hallam continued his ocular inspection of his ship. Along the boat deck the denuded davits swung starkly. Two of those to windward were bent inboard until their tackle blocks rapped on the engine room casing; but the davits were of four-inch diameter steel! The seas had made a clean sweep of the boat wreckage; of the six lifeboats there was not a single one remaining, beyond the bow-frame of No. 3 on the leeward side.

The stokehold ventilators stood, because their height rendered them somewhat immune from the weightier water that came aboard. The funnel was caked to its upper rim with dried salt; its original coloring was disguised. What had happened aft he was unable to see from his position, but the poop was stripped of its two service boats. Washports in the forward bulwarks had been torn from their hinges —probably that circumstance accounted for the *Lamplough's* continued survival, since the heaviest water had slopped overboard almost as soon as it arrived—and spare derricks lying lashed in deck-chocks were adrift. Where the forecastle bell had been was a gap. The bell itself was embedded like a roundshot in the solid timber front of Captain Hallam's deck cabin.

As day waxed, his cabin servant came—wind-blown, appearing queerly emaciated in fluttering white, his face blue-green in hue, his eyes red-rimmed and staring; his teeth a-chatter. He had a towel-wrapped mug of coffee in his hand; and he managed to warp his way on his belly to the wheel. As Hallam joyously whipped away the towel and lifted the steaming mug to his lips, the contents were thrown scaldingly in his face, not a drop remaining in the vessel. By that fact he estimated the wind force as at least one hundred and thirty miles an hour. But he had wanted that coffee to stiffen him and counteract the aching fatigue that beset his muscles. Mere standing against the wind was more difficult toil than climbing a mountain. The cabin boy hung to the wheel standard and Hallam's legs indiscriminately. Hallam reached down and yanked him to his feet.

"Find—serang!" he yelled in his ear. "Mate—anyone, savvy?"

"Me plenty savvy!" The teeth were not so much chattering as ringing like harp strings.

"A man—up here—go. Coffee after—in bottle, see? No—possibly drink from cup—a bottle!" The boy was whipped from his grip, fetched up against the rail at the ladder head with a squelch, then fluttered down to the deck. Again Hallam was alone. Staring forward he saw a face show momentarily at the forecastle door. A big sea descended, the face was withdrawn and the door shut. More and more did he become anxious to get the derricks lashed over the hatches. The ragged raw fringes of inky cloud ahead meant even more wind and bigger seas.

The serang was berthed in the midships section, along with the tindals and the petty officers of the engine room and the stewards. There oughtn't to be much difficulty in rousing him out, Hallam thought. There was no need to negotiate the threatening waste of the foredeck. But when a man did show on the bridge it was not the serang but the tindal of the starboard watch, an old, frail man, who presented the appearance of a skin-clad skeleton. The serang, he explained in gasps, was broken up, caught by a sea when trying to reach the bridge. With difficulty he had contrived to crawl to his cabin. He was now unconscious and bleeding, though he, the tindal, had done his best. With his arm about the native's neck, holding his ear to his lips, Hallam explained what he wanted done. The cargo derricks must be unshipped and lashed with cargo chains over the hatches. One man must be stationed on the bridge to maintain touch with that place and the rest of the ship. The steam whistle lanyard must be restored and placed handy. And these necessary matters must be attended to promptly.

THE tindal eyed the swirling maelstrom of the fore well deck with fear distended eyes as these instructions were delivered. He shirked the responsibility of leading a native crew through that horror. He was an obedient and cheerful slave, but he lacked the self-confidence to command.

"And see if you can find the mate," added Hallam. Not that Pereixa mattered much. The only use he might be would be to take the wheel whilst the skipper went and performed impossible miracles. The tindal vanished. He did make an attempt to negotiate the well deck, but drew back, scared. For a while nothing happened; then the boy arrived with a quart bottle of coffee. It was possible to drink this, and it heartened the skipper enormously. It put new life into his numbed body and freshened his brain, enabling him to think. If the typhoon didn't increase in ferocity, the *Lamplough* might weather it even yet.

He was thinking this when he felt the throbbing of the deck subside alarmingly; and almost the instant after, the lubber's line in the compass bowl swung to leeward; the wind drove down from the bow, then from almost abeam; the fabric rolled torturedly, and wallowed under a falling sea. There was a muffled ring from the engine room telegraph, and Hallam saw the pointer run past stop and return. He wanted to scream but didn't. He waited a while, half paralyzed, before he crept to the speaking tube, where the whistle was sputtering feebly. Withdrawing the whistle, he clapped an ear to the mouthpiece; heard the voice of the chief:

"Cirrculatin' pump's gone phut!"

"You've got to keep her going," clamored Hallam. "She'll sink else!"

"Then she maun sink—we canna do a thing here." Plainly the chief was at odds with himself, disgruntled. The very accident he had criticized in another engine room had occurred in his! He might just have been an ordinary engineer, trained in Leith instead of Renfrew! But according to his evidence the *Lamplough* was now a useless log, entirely unable to combat the storm. She was falling off into the trough of the sea, and her rolling assumed staggering proportions.

Presently the chief engineer in person blew to Hallam's side. All one half of

Macgregor's face was peeled of its scalded skin; and he had lost the sight of an eye for ever, owing to a jet of superheated steam impinging on the pupil. He was shaven and shivering. He began to explain. Hallam gave him no attention; excuses wouldn't save the hull. Only effort, Herculean effort at that. Something had to be tried.

"Stop here, you!" Hallam said.

The engineer gaped at him, his remaining eye taking in the visible devastation.

"Losh presairve's a'!" he exclaimed piously. "She's a derelict!"

"Will be soon, unless——"

Captain Hallam left the wheel and was wafted to the ladder. The house sheltered him until he reached the boat deck; but when he made for the other ladder leading to the well, it seemed as if he couldn't move. The wind tore at him, shrieking murderously, as if recognizing its main opponent in the small, bearded man. Hallam warped himself along, hand over fist, by the life rail; dropped belly flat and crawled to the head of the lower ladder. He knew what he was going to attempt. Rigging a sea anchor was the only hope of keeping the *Lamplough* alive, now that her fighting heart had ceased to beat. Consequently a sea anchor would be rigged, if human hands could do it. He slithered down the ladder, into waist deep brine that tore across the well with the force of an avalanche, and fought a perilous way to the hatch corner. Under the coamings' shelter he reached the wried winch. It was almost adrift on its bed; with two holding down bolts sheared clean away. Thence he essayed a struggle to the fore hatch, was caught by the full weight of a sea in the passage, and smashed against the bulwarks. Breathless, he dropped, head and shoulders out of a coverless washport, and the inboard water driving at him like a battering ram.

"This finishes it!" he thought. He stared down into the yeasty horror of the lee water, which flung up spires of spray to grip him and tear him down. He was slipping outboard, inch by inch. There wasn't anything to grip. But the relentless sea defeated itself. A wave came, twitched the *Lamplough* into a delirium of wild motion and passed beneath her. On the lee side it roared up, and smote Hallam a vicious blow in the face that almost killed him. But it thrust him back through the washport enough to allow him a purchase with his hands. Scraped badly, with a bleeding gash on his forehead, he squirmed inboard, and wedged himself under a stanchion to regain his breath. This done, he again went forward.

VII

THE native crew flatly refused to leave their harborage—at first. Death was due; they would meet it with their accustomed fatalism; but nothing was now to be gained by fighting. Precisely how he convinced them otherwise, Hallam could never say; but somehow they trickled from the forecastle and set to work. It was bitter, soul-searing toil demanded of them; but the captain did as much as any three. Watching their chances, they unshipped the derricks that were to have safeguarded the hatches, and contrived to lash them together in the shape of a triangle. Once they understood what was required of them, Hallam left, because the seas were cascading aboard murderously. He relieved Macgregor on the bridge and told him to eject oil outboard—anything to ease the weight of the seas. Then he returned to the battle ground.

It was falling night again when the sea anchor was completed. Two men's legs were broken in the operation; and before launching the contraption over the bow, Hallam splinted the broken bones roughly, using such matters as came to hand from the carpenter's and serang's lockers, and bestowing the sufferers in their bunks with such padding as effectually chocked them off and prevented unnecessary agonies in the ship's wild rolling. If he marveled at all during the daylight hours it was that the *Lamplough* didn't roll herself over, though the oil trickled overside certainly sleeked the worst of the wave crests and prevented them from breaking aboard with their initial ferocity.

Already Hallam's quiet-working brain was contemplating further possibilities. Useless engines were bad in an area of sea where a year might pass without a ship's smoke being sighted. He had fourteen hundred human beings to keep alive —to feed amongst other things, with a limited supply of food. There was no boat to attempt a journey to the nearest land in order to summon aid. The *Lamplough* was not equipped with wireless.

Therefore he intended, when the fury of the typhoon expended itself, as it must, provided the ship were still above water, to sail her to harbor under such canvas as he could rig. Meantime, there was the question of getting the sea anchor overboard. He demanded steam on deck, and got it. Though the engines were not working, one boiler was still being fired in case the pumps were needed. He drove the stokehold crew to assist, using no personal violence, merely that quiet ability to command men to do the best that was in them.

He weighted his triangle of spars with a stream anchor, lashed a double awning across the skeleton, even fitted the whole ungainly affair with a canvas bag filled with thick oil, and himself stabbed the non-porous cloth with a sail needle to permit the viscid oil to percolate and do its work in flattening the seas. The port bower cable was unshackled from the old-fashioned anchor and roused along the deck; reshackled to the sea anchor. One forward derrick had been retained in position. It was now hoisted; and a fall rove. A strop of six-inch rope was fastened to the triangle; hooked to the winch fall; word was given to hoist away. Taking advantage of a roll, the cumbrous contrivance was lowered overboard, and Hallam himself chopped the strop adrift, because not one of the men would essay the task. Slowly the *Lamplough* felt the head drag of the drogher, with its weighted apex biting into the solid water; slowly she rounded up towards the wind and became easier in her movements. Hallam paid out sixty fathoms of cable, so that the bight would help in the drag and also give greater resilience, that the chain might not snap. By this time it was black dark again.

When the work was done Hallam went aft again, bowed with weariness, his hands literally stripped of skin. He warped himself to the screaming bridge. Groping he encountered Macgregor.

"Good man!" he said fervently. "She'll have to do now, for a bit."

"A wee dram, then!" suggested the engineer. "We've eaten naething——"

"Perhaps—later. Stay here and I'll look at those coolies!"

VIII

HE CONTRIVED to make his way below, avoiding the temptation of his cabin. He did not dare enter that sanctuary, fearful lest its shelter might weaken his resistance. Instead, he worked down to the isolation chamber. The stench there was unbelievable, as was the fetid heat. He was hardened in a grim school, but his stomach retched, none the less, as he encountered the first foul waft of vitiated air. Somehow or other this stew would have to be freshened, he decided.

He inspected the plague-stricken men. All were still alive. The trouble was that he had made no arrangement for their tendance. He wondered how to do it. To send the crew down there meant the risk of their catching the infection and becoming useless. He needed every man of his people for the work he meditated. If his officers had been any good he might have enlisted them; but they weren't. That set him wondering where Pereixa was, and whether the huddle he'd seen on the bridge, and neglected during the tortured hours of toil, was a dead second mate or a living. Meantime, as there was no assistance available, he busied himself with the patients, making them easier, arranging gadgets to prevent them rolling to the ship's rolls. He was almost suffocated when he opened the communicating door and entered the wider space of the 'tween-decks proper.

Only two or three hurricane lamps, wildly swinging, illuminated that horror of a place. Doré might have done the subject justice with a pencil; it is doubtful if written words could. The coolies were huddled together, moaning. They had shrieked themselves into exhaustion. There was hardly a man amongst them all whose knuckles were not abraided by reason of his wild beating on the plates of the side. Their belongings were smashed to fragments. Camphor-wood chests were nothing better than chewed kindlings. A mass of material, churned into chaos, slithered across the deck plates with every roll the hull gave. Someone screamed piercingly as Hallam entered the stew; men began to creep towards him on all fours. They sagged to the side to the rolls.

"Wonder what they think they're going to do?" thought Hallam. They fawned around his knees, chattering in dialects he couldn't understand. He shook his head but smiled encouragement, and that made them angry. There were scowls and mutterings. He began to think of Macgregor's armored hose and the steam jets that were more effective than pistol bullets. But he had to face out what was promised alone. If he showed fear, he believed, the pack would be on him in a scratching, threshing welter of panic destruction. That low, scared moaning came mostly from the women and children, seasick for the most part, numb with horror; and the men blamed him for their plight.

He tried to find the headman—failed. There were many figures huddled in the remoter corners. He heard stabbing cries. The plague was progressing, as he had expected it would. Suddenly the load on his shoulders became unbearable; he gulped. Actual moisture came to his blinking eyes. Even up there on the bridge during the storm's first fury, he had not felt so lonely as here among a thousand human beings who might as well have been dumb for all the sense their frantic jabberings conveyed to Hallam's aching brain.

He did his best to explain matters, speaking the *lingua franca* loudly and slowly; but it made no impression. He held himself warily, expecting the pack attack; too tired to care overly; and yet, with the thought at back of it all, that if he went down, chaos must follow. The wild lurches of the ship helped him, however. Whenever the crowd seemed disposed to overwhelm him, the *Lamplough* pitched them *nolens volens* to the lower side; their feet slithering on a greasy, water washed deck, into tangled heaps amongst piled, foul water. It was a pretty hopeless situation. But it had to be tackled: there was no armistice with enraged Nature.

HALLAM forced himself to ignore the threats and stolidly pushed his way to where the huddled shapes lay. Plague again, of course—you couldn't mistake the symptoms. And his demijohn of painkiller—what of it? Smashed, in all likelihood—and its dispenser down with the cursed disease. He discovered one he took to be the headman knotted in agony. Captain Hallam picked him up and carried him through to the pest house; returning, he collected another victim, and transported him. Single-handed, no man of the coolies offering help, he conveyed every infected body from the living space. His back ached; his head ached; his eyes smarted; but he did it. It was epic work, but he didn't realize it.

In the isolation chamber he made fresh disposition of his patients, now numbering close on a hundred. He laid them athwartships so that the rolls would not affect them as much as if they were placed fore and aft; and when this was done he patiently worked his way back to the midships, and, out of the medicine closet, brewed another demijohn full of his mixture.

Nursing this carefully, he enlisted the cabin boy and a steward, and marched them below. Sufferer by sufferer he dosed the patients copiously. He made his helpers swallow doses, too, prevention being better than cure. In some mysterious fashion Hallam's calm indomitableness dominated his underlings' natural fear; they seemed actually eager to help him. Understanding the dialects, too, in some measure, he used them as interpreters; took the boy through to the main quarters, discovered the trouble there. The coolies were anxious to know if they would be compensated for their perished belongings! Nothing else seemed to matter overmuch to them. He assured them that consideration would be given to their claims, and counseled courage and stoicism. The boy explained to certain spokesmen that Captain Hallam was as a god for bravery, and that he himself by his personal wisdom would see that the ship endured no peril from which she could not escape.

Hallam went back to the bridge. Cooped up below he hungered for clean air; his very soul seemed to have accumulated a scum of foulness. He opened his lungs to the rush of wind which nearly choked him. He was foul within and without. He discovered no abatement in the typhoon—an increase, if anything. It had got thoroughly into its stride and was making sport of the wide Pacific.

Bethinking himself of the second mate he slid to leeward; but the huddle had vanished. Whilst he pondered on this and e apparently deserted bridge, Macgregor s there beside him—and Macgregor's eath was hot with whisky fumes.

"Ye're there?" the engineer clamored. Veel?"

"I've got you to count on—just you!" id Hallam without anger; he was too ed for that. "Can't you cut the whisky t even now?"

"Ye'd be a' the better for a dram yer-l'. So long as the engines run, is my edge. But it's just one nip I've had—' I needed it. I've carted the second to s bunk."

"He's not killed, then?"

"Worse luck, no. He yelled a bit syne. didna think ought could harm the ship the helm's nae use. He was sufferin'. n Pereixa's a sharger. Huddled in his nk, wi' the blankets ower his heid. I ll't him. I mopped his dripping floor ' him, the scunnle. Would he come oot? e wouldna. Sick wi' fear, prayin' in sms when he's no' vomitin'. Ye never w siclike a sicht."

"Stop here a bit and I'll talk to him," pped Hallam. He clawed his way be-w again and visited the mate's room. ixa was back in his bunk, under the owy blankets. In the comparative calm f belowdecks his voice could be heard, w in a shriek, now in a whisper, gasping ayers. The cabin floor slopped to the ight of the door sill with befouled water. llam stepped to the bunk, tore off the nkets, yanked the coward out by his ck and pants. Pereixa looked. The ate's face was puffed and greenish; his yes held a fixed mad stare. A cheap ary of scented sandalwood was in his gers. He strove to continue his telling f the beads, his teeth chattering.

"Out on deck, Mister Mate!" said Cap-in Hallam. "What're you doing ma-ingering here, you sodger! I've more than lf a mind to—log you!" That was the iest punishment he could inflict—an en-ry in the official log; and even to him, ho counted that the most grievous hurt at could come a sailorman's way, it emed wofully inadequate. Pereixa made o move to comply. He dropped on his ees and plaited the beads, whining his tile prayers. His face was set; the lips etched back from yellow, uneven teeth n a mocking grin. Occasionally he retched ilently. Raw fear, uncontrollable, was his trouble. He was mad with fright. What was to be gained by hauling such a useless thing to the deck? Nothing. As likely as not the first sea would lick him overboard. Further, if the men saw him, they'd probably take their cue from him. Hallam set his foot on the distorted face and pushed the second in command under his bunk as if he'd been a treacherous mongrel.

On his way back to the bridge he dipped into his own room, and its orderly calm seemed to wrap him in indolence. Everything was much the same here as always, save that certain movables had been chocked off by the boy, who took pride in the sea parlor. Water had leaked in and saturated the carpet; but the brasses were polished and the lamp burned steadily in its gimbals.

Hallam bent to study the barometer. He whistled. His heart suddenly became like a lump of lead in his breast. This was as ugly a glass as a man could wish to see, not because of its lowness but because of the wild pumping of the mercury. It hardly appeared to be worth while going on, he thought tiredly. From the glass his gaze moved to the portrait of his wife.

"Got to stick it, old girl!" he said. He moved to the cupboard where his liquor was stored, turned the key, took out a bottle. But he put it back unopened. Whisky wouldn't help. During the coming night it was likely that his every jaded faculty would be exercised to full capacity; and more so than ever in the black hours between midnight and two o'clock. By that time the liquor would have worked itself out; and he would probably take another swig—and another. No; it wouldn't do! So, from his cabin he descended to the general saloon, where crockery was crashing; and there he found a steward, almost paralyzed. Him he forced to prepare sandwiches—great chunks of bread and bully beef. He ate one hungrily, realizing that food had not passed his lips for twenty-four hours. He told the servant to make coffee in large quantities, and went to the galley to instruct the cook to the same effect. He discovered several of the crew crouched in the alleyway. He was told they had been fed as well as was possible, and commended the tindals and the cook, munching at his sandwich the while.

Then he reascended to the bridge. "There's coffee and sandwiches going down below," he told Macgregor. "I'll carry on here."

"I'm no' hungered," said the chief.

"There's nothing to be done below, I take it, Chief?"

"Forbye a new cirrculatin' pump, naught. An' wi'out it she's helpless; ye ken that you that's hauf an engineer yersel'? She's had her carotid artery cut in a manner o' speakin'. Man, it's peetiable tae see her flurries."

"And not to be able to do anything to help her," Hallam agreed. "Keep steam on the steering gear, though; she's more kindly when she's humored. Pereixa's all in; stark raving mad with funk. There's just us two——"

"It micht be waur!" commented the chief.

IX

THROUGHOUT the livelong night, which was if possible more frantic than that preceding, Captain Hallam did his best to humor the agonized *Lamplough,* regretting the insufficiency of his ability. She was like an inanimate log or a half tide rock: passive but protesting. He himself was numb with the drive of storm, dazed by the rush of adverse circumstance. There was really nothing to do save wait in half idleness.

His physical loneliness was not now so apparent, whatever his aloofness of soul. He had caused members of the crew to join him on the bridge, to be handy in case of added distress. Sometimes Macgregor blew up to that windy eminence, too; but for the most part the chief was busy below, attempting impossible miracles with his beloved job. Settled down to desperation, meals began to appear; the initial panic fright of the domestic staff lessened and permitted them to get busy, even to make some futile efforts at mopping up the havoc, though it was like cleaning a house that was about to be pulled down.

Through the night the Pacific Ocean dispassionately washed over the beaten *Lamplough.* Another dawn broke, yellow and murky as before, and yet, to Hallam's weather wise senses, more promising than that of the previous day. A layman would have noticed no diminution in wind pre sure; but his training taught him th some of the venom was out of it. Inste of shrieking at a hundred and forty mil an hour it was, perhaps, a hundred an twenty-five. But it was easing—that mad for a new hope. And it was in thi microscopic easement that the chief dange lay, for a man's fighting sense might b lulled fatally. It was necessary for Hallam to keep every faculty still mor keenly on the alert. The drowsy hou before the dawn of the soldier's watch wa here, when, if he'd had officers he coul trust, he might have snatched a wink o sleep in the chart house; but which now must be endured alone.

With the lessening of wind, there wa an increase of sea. The combers were no flattened quite so much. They towere uglily, vast, formless, soulless masses o potential destruction, buffeting the *Lamplough* where she squattered at her hawse with vicious spite, as though chagrine that she had not succumbed to their primary onslaught.

With dawn's first glimmer he had th crew collected. He left a tindal momentarily in charge of the bridge and struggle through torrential water to the forecastle there he tended the sufferers of the gale' first wrath. He took with him prope splints and bandages, and, because it wa his nature, made a workmanlike job o setting the shattered bones. He went back to the bridge, drank coffee from a bottle again, and munched a sodden biscuit; what time he instructed the tindal in the art of windjamming. The first essential was to set canvas aft, to help keep the ship's bow to the seas. That would be done immediately.

Some of the crew looked ugly. They wailed that they were at the end of their endurance, incapable of effort. The dul apathy of their kind in presence of death affected them. Hallam quickened their interest in life by means of words at first, then by blows, even threats from a revolver. He drove them aft, and saw the trysail set—an unseamanlike job, but its effect was instantly apparent. The *Lamplough* grew a little steadier as she heeled her rails under.

Macgregor appearing, gloomy and morose, because none of his attempts had served to set the circulating pump to rights, Hallam questioned whether to send him to the pest house or leave him in charge of the bridge himself, what time he played medical inspector. The chief had slept and eaten with fair regularity and was not overly to be pitied. Hallam decided to leave him above, and floundered below.

One by one he dosed the sick; so far, to his astonishment, there had been no deaths. One by one he transported the new victims to the isolation ward; then he appointed a new headman and made him understand that the 'tweendecks must be restored to some sort of order, and a régime of cleanliness imposed. He decided to send his crew down to help in that good work, but the after trysail burst from its bolt ropes just as he emerged on deck again, and the crew found other employment—in bending a fresh sail.

This work done he visited the midships. Pereixa was hopelessly insane, a gibbering lunatic; not violent, only maudlin. Whether his reason would return or not, it was impossible to say. The yellow streak in the mate had spread and leavened his entire cosmos. He was useless, not even fit for dunnage. He huddled under his fouled blankets, sobbing and moaning and whining incoherent prayers to saints in whom he had forgotten how to believe.

Nor was the second mate in much better case. He was sober enough to endure agony from his disrupted internal organs; but a coma of pain enveloped him for the most part. Recognizing Hallam as he attempted to ascertain the measure of his hurts, he expressed sorrow, a wish to be able to help. Storm and suffering had discovered his sodden manhood, but too late. He might have been useful could he have moved; as it was, he was merely another burden on Hallam's shoulders.

He disposed the hurt man as best he could and dosed him with an opiate to ease his suffering; instructing the steward to repeat the treatment at stated intervals. He forgot nothing, even so far as instructing the carpenter to reduce the fresh water ration to the coolies in view of the protracted voyage. Twenty-four hours before, fresh water had appeared a matter for indifference; death had mocked and mowed. But now, with the *Lamplough* still alive, the ordinary threads of life had to be taken up and sorted and knotted together as before.

Hallam went back to the bridge. There was no charge—water sloshing everywhere and the hammering violence of the wearying wind held sway. His every nerve craved a surcease, his every muscle was a half-crippling ache. His eyes opened gummily when he spoke, drooped in the middle of a sentence.

"We're weathering it," he said. "Not so bad, Chief."

"Aye, but what aboot it afterwards, mon Captain? I'd ha' staked ma professional reputation on yon pump—a beauty; and she nae better than the *Chowloon!* I can gi'e ye a' the steam ye like, but what good's steam wi'oot the engines that it drives?"

"There's always canvas, Chief."

"Canvas!" All the derision the engine room ever had for the deck sounded in the snort. "Canvas ma grandmither's fut! Ye canna ship-rig a steam warehouse like this'n."

"We're going to try, though," said Hallam. Since there was no man aboard who knew the first thing about sails beyond himself—he himself was brig trained and windjammer bred—he got to work without waste of time, readying the ship against a change of weather. He moved from deck to bridge, always drenched, always sore with the fretting salt, indomitable. Seldom he expressed anger, his was a generous and astounding patience. The native crew were children, thick-witted, to be tutored patiently in an art that was double-Greek to them. But before night drew down, certain spars had been conveyed from aft and rigged and fashioned so that they could be hauled into position when the wind permitted.

Hallam endured another night of horror. The wind occasionally dropped a dozen miles an hour or so; only to freshen up again; but the piebald fashion of it increased the sea and set it running in an ugly cross. Rudder work was useful here. And since no other man could handle the rudder, Hallam did. At daylight he got the men to work on the canvas, routing out every cloth the ship carried, getting it shaped and sewn and roped.

He yawned wearily as he left the wheel in charge of a quartermaster for a little while, and wondered if he dare snatch a wink of sleep, all-standing as he was. He was afraid to—afraid lest he might sink into deep wells of fatigue and so drug his customary alertness. No, he decided, he had to keep awake. He intended to send the chief down to the 'tweendecks; but failed to find him. Returning after this failure, he slumped into his own cabin, not at all certain why he went there. Maybe he unconsciously sought the unvoiced approval of his wife's photograph. Maybe a temptation to set weariness at bay by means of a drink troubled him.

He discovered Macgregor sprawled soddenly on the floor, with an empty whisky bottle clanking and chattering at every roll of the ship.

"A good man, the chief, if it wasn't for the liquor," he muttered. "It's a pity—a big pity!" Then the temptation gripped him bitingly. The odor of liquor clawed at his throat. Lethe could be so cheaply bought! Why should it devolve on him alone to handle this wreck of a ship with its pest-ridden crowd, beyond the bounds of man's possible effort? A Chinese owned ship at that! What did it matter? The whole boiling aboard wasn't worth the snap of a white man's finger. To hell with the ship and everything else! A bottle of whisky would purchase indifference to the subtle fear that had all along troubled him, only to be fought down and kept down. The ship could founder for all of him—carry him down through sleek green wastes to an unending rest on the shining sands!

"Mustn't neglect my duty!" he muttered thickly. He'd turned from envious contemplation of the drunken chief to catch the sheen on the glass of his wife's portrait. He mixed a fresh demijohn of his diabolical remedy and went below.

TWO days later the occasional wondering sea birds saw the *Lamplough*, with meager spars lashed across her pole masts, with ridiculous canvas spread therefrom, lolloping ungainly across the long, swinging run of the sleeked Pacific swells. Her hatches were wide open, that pure air might descend. Her decks were scrubbed clean of the sea grass that had collected there, even her brasswork was polished. On the poop aft, where the best air ran, the plague-stricken people lay, segregated from the haler ones who squatted on the after well deck. The pest was mastered. There hadn't been a single death. For twenty-four hours no new case of the disease had developed.

Captain Hallam stared through eyes like boiled onions along his transformed ship deck. The sea anchor had been got aboard, a twelve hour job, and the spars were now crossed and clothed on the mainmast. A swollen-headed but contrite chief engineer climbed to Mount Misery, rubbing his hands on oily waste.

He regarded the forlorn figure there, and maybe he recognized the astounding heroism encased within.

"Weel dune, mon Captain!" he congratulated. "I'm no' promisin'—mind, I'm no' promisin' but—mebbe yon patch we're worrkin' ower the pump face'll haud. If it does ye'll get steam, man—*steam.* No' up to fu' power, ye'll understand, but mair than yer Susan's shimmies o' stays'ls can gi'e. Awa' an' rest—I'll haud her for a whilie—ye desairve a nap."

Presently Hallam staggered below. He stripped off his outer clothing in his shining cabin, yawned, stretched himself. He looked at the immaculate lure of his bunk, white crisp sheets, feather pillows. He yawned again. Then, moving like a man of a hundred and fifty years old, he opened a drawer and drew therefrom a writing tablet and a fountain pen.

"My dear wife," he wrote, *"I'm afraid I've neglected to write for the last few days—we got hold of a bit of bad weather and it kept me busy. It wasn't anything to worry about, just the ordinary run of duty, but—"* The pen slipped from his lax fingers as his head drooped. Captain Hallam, having completed his duty meanwhile, slept.

GUNS *Across The* TABLE

By PARKER KERBY

—Who gives us a unique character, a gunman of the underworld, wise, witty and loyal—and somehow admirable. It is one of the most exciting first stories I can remember— THE EDITOR

IT SEEMS to be quite the thing these days to write a history of yourself and, personally, I think it's a much better idea than the old style of waiting until you're dead fifty years. You see, in my line, you have to live from day to day and so you kind of lose interest in everything except the present.

Me, I'm a confidential representative, which is the same as private detective. In other words my gun is for sale to the highest bidder as in "the days of old when knights were bold." I play on the side of the right—as I see it—and anyhow I always play 'em both ways to the center for the benefit of the police department whenever the occasion arises. For this reason, while the cops don't sit up nights thinking up favors for me, they don't throw any monkey wrenches in my coffee grinder. I call getting a clear road from John Law and a check from my client about all the breaks any bright young fella needs to get along.

I'm thirty-one, white, single and the toughest battler you'd want to meet up with at wits, fists, knives or bullets. I believe the big shots always start off their history by saying to what they attribute their success. In my case I consider the fact that I'm alive and healthy a damn big success and I attribute it to the fact that I grew up in the New York gutters without having anybody but an old drunken bum to take care of me—which he did regularly every time he got real good and potted. That is, he did if he could get his hands or any throwable articles on me, which, believe me, was very seldom. I don't know where he got me originally. Maybe he intended telling me just before he died, but he was so cock-eyed drunk at the time that he couldn't talk. And ever since I've been too busy to think about it.

I've sold papers, blacked boots, driven trucks, been a boxfighter and a ham actor. And while doing these little things I found out that I had a mathematical brain, built to order for various games of chance with the pasteboards, and also I found out they must have nursed me on a .38 Colt. At any rate I can handle one as well as anybody this side of a story book.

By the time I was twenty I had probably

the toughest gang on the West Side of New York. I was living by the cards and sitting right on top of the world. Just before my twenty-second birthday, good luck caused me to turn my gang loose on something that worked out to the complete satisfaction of the guy that once owned the New York Police Force and who still held a second and third mortgage on it. I didn't know anything about his interest in the matter but it happened I did him a big favor, and he sent for me to come see him. Well, we both were graduates of deah ole Gutter College and took a liking to each other. It wasn't long before he convinced me that the only way to get away with things throughout a long and happy life was to do the things in the name of the law and not against it. That little idea being clear to me, I started working for the old boy in his private detective agency. His close supervision and my natural ability soon made me star operator and I stuck with him until the old boy died two years ago.

The only thing left for me to do was to start out on my own account and now I own my own little brownstone front, entirely for purposes of personal safety, and there's seven or eight thousand to my account in a nice big bank. I've got two assistants to call on if I need help, one of whom takes care of my stomach and my house and learned his oats about valet work up at the big stone mansion located in Ossining, New York. The other guy is my chauffeur and there was a time when he had to be the best and fastest mechanic in New York or he wouldn't have gotten away with all the cars he did. But I play a solitaire game and don't handle cases involving a miniature police force, so the big agencies haven't any hard feelings for me either.

The best idea of how I work is to tell you about the little job I finished yesterday. I never count a case as finished until I'm safely tucked away in my little brownstone front and the doctor has said my bullet or knife wounds are not so very bad but that I'll undoubtedly pull through. The job in question involved one "Slick Thomas," as he was known to the cops and the wise guys along the Avenue. His racket was blackmail, with emphasis on the first syllable. It's also rumored around that he's an awful bad actor with a .45 automatic and peddles dope to the would-be society crowd that has a little money and nothing else. With that class, he gets by big on account of his being a smooth dresser and having a great line of candy he can whisper in the girls' ears while twirling them around at the tea dances. To this class of would-be Four Hundred he's known as Thomas Navarre. His one big mistake was in getting a yen for the daughter of a guy who's planted a few men in his day, and who in addition to throwing a dirty bullet was a two-fisted fighting fool, from what I gather. His day was past about twenty-five years ago from a physical standpoint but his brain is just about as docile as a hungry tiger's.

This guy's daughter is as straight as a die and no bozo can start any free and easy stuff with her while she's conscious. Which fact don't matter to Thomas as he's quite an artist with knockout drops, which he proceeded to use to his advantage. Well, he fixed things so she'd get plentys the free advertising in the tabloid papers if she put up a roar and he used this as a club to carry on the good work after he'd shut off her first squawk. Of course, in a few weeks he was tired of her so he starts feedin' her dope on the Q. T. and before she's wise to it she's a full fledged snow bird and Thomas has another customer. Oh, the dame had her old man's spunk and she tried to get Thomas on two occasions but I believe I mentioned that he's a topnotch scrapper and gunman. After picking up his history here and there, I decided if I want to get that young man, I've got to move fast—and how.

WELL, the way it all came to light was that by luck the old man finds some snow on his daughter. At first the kid wouldn't kick in with any information, but after being locked in her room for twenty-four hours without any dope, why she comes through with the story. The old boy at once slips a .45 Colt in his pocket and goes around to pay his respects to Thomas, but that gent isn't living at his last address any more. After wandering around unsuccessfully for a couple of days, he decides it's a job for someone further away from seventy than he is. Then he starts looking for some cold-blooded, fast-shooting bird that will do what he'd like to do and one whom he can trust. That last part of the sentence brings him to my humble dwelling. He could sick the Federal boys on the trail of Thomas but that isn't what he wants. He doesn't tell me to bump little Thomas off the map but he does retain me for twenty-five hundred iron men and mentions that if I can prove I've been successful in bringing him to his "proper" justice, why he'll double the ante.

So that's that and I start out by getting this bird's history. Believe me I've seen a lot of guys that needed killing but not as badly as this bozo.

I used my two assistants to help me gather this info, and inside of a week I knew how to act when I met him. The last part was easy—just shoot on sight. I always like to go into the little details carefully for it usually saves a lot of time afterwards and—well—I'm still alive because of being as careful as possible and that's more than several other people can say.

There was nothing stingy about the way Thomas handled his dough, and every year he made fifty thousand, which he frequently did, why he spent fifty-five. So I started playing the night clubs and making a few cautious inquiries. It soon became clear that up to a week and a half before I started on his trail, he had been very much in evidence but had suddenly dropped out of sight. I added one and one and made about seventeen when that info came to light. You see, as near as I could figure it, the day he took the fly was about ditto with the day the old man caught the girl.

An idea like that is worth a lot of thought and, of course, the main point was as to whether it was just a coincidence or had Thomas found out that the old boy was on his trail and if so, how? Naturally if I could answer the last question that would fix up the first. Well, the only way Thomas could get his info was from the girl's folks, which was out of order, or from someone close to them. The girl was, of course, shut up. I had a dirty idea that some servant spilled the beans so I popped up to the old boy's house one morning and caught him at breakfast. I briefly outlined that my "investigation" had met a detour and was not yet back on the main drag. Then I asked if the girl had a personal maid and if so, could I see her. She did and I did. I took her into the library and closed the doors. She was a nice enough looking dame but she didn't seem to be over burdened with gray matter, so I started on the confidence line. Sitting right close, but facing her from another chair, I got very confidential.

"Miss Hall," I said, "I've got to get some help from you. As you probably know, I've been employed to fix up this trouble the family has on their hands and aside from the fact that I'm being paid to do it, I'm personally going to do my very best to help a nice girl that got the hard luck she did. Now there's just one point I want to clean up as a matter of detail. When was the last time Mr. Navarre called up here?"

"Why about five days before—before—her father——"

"Was it exactly five days before," I interrupted.

"Well, let me see. Yes, exactly."

"That was before the trouble," I said, "but he has, of course, called up since then. In fact, as I recall, he called up that very day, didn't he?"

"No," she replied thoughtfully and then added, "Oh—why yes, he did too. I'd forgotten all about it because of the strain. She was so hysterical, you know."

"Of course. Quite naturally," I added, "and can you remember just what you said?"

"Well, Johnson, the butler, answered and told him, I believe, that she was ill and couldn't talk to anyone. Mr. Navarre asked if it wasn't quite sudden and Johnson said it was. Then Mr. Navarre said it was of the greatest importance that he speak with her. Johnson said that it was impossible but that he would transfer the call to her father. Mr. Navarre decided that wasn't necessary but asked to have me come to the phone. I answered and he told me who he was and then he—well—he stammered and talked as though he was embarrassed about something."

When she told me that cold-blooded killer was embarrassed, I almost burst out laughing, but I didn't interrupt and she kept right on with the story.

"Well, finally he said to me, 'Miss Hall, I've always heard you spoken of in the highest terms so I know I can trust you. Ah—there's been quite a lot of trouble in the house today, hasn't there?' So I said, yes, there had. 'Oh, my,' he said, 'she was expecting there might be. I'm terribly sorry. Suppose you tell me just what happened.' So I told him, I didn't know much about it except that her father had found her taking some medicine or something and didn't like it. He owns a chemical factory and I guess he thought it was harmful. Anyway he was very angry and shouted at her terribly. He wanted to know who induced her to take it. She wouldn't tell so he said he'd tie her in bed for twenty-four hours and then she would."

I interrupted her story at this point and asked in a soft voice: "You told all that to Mr. Navarre just as you told me and you mentioned about her being tied in bed?"

"Yes, sir," she said. "I thought it was all right inasmuch as he stated he knew about it already."

"Yes, yes, certainly," I replied, wondering how people as dumb as she could get along.

So Thomas knew she'd be without dope for twenty-four hours. No wonder he beat it. So that was that.

"That's all I want to know, Miss Hall," I said. "Don't tell a word of our conversation to anyone and if they ask you, refer them to me."

With that I let her go and went out to the old boy.

"I've got to see your daughter," I said.

"You can't see her," he said. "She's in a very dangerous condition and I've placed her in a private sanitarium."

"What do you mean, dangerous condition?"

"Why a sort of nervous breakdown," he replies. "The doctor said it was best she didn't see anyone, not even me."

"What about her mother?"

"Her mother died several years ago. She is the only child."

I put my hand on his shoulder and got very sympathetic. "Don't you realize that your daughter, through no fault of her own, was drawn into as bad a predicament as anyone can get into. Now you love her and have her best interests at heart, but don't you realize that when she needed soft words and sympathy that you lit into her like a ton of bricks and yelled your head off at her. Now I'll go up and condole with her, explain how much you love her and incidentally get one or two pieces of information that I need."

WELL, I'm a pretty smooth talker when I lay off my gutter dialect, so finally the ole boy calls up the sanitarium and says its absolutely necessary that I see his daughter. A half hour later I'm sittin' beside her bed and believe me if I ever saw a dame that needed soft words and sympathy, why she's it. So for about an hour I just hand out those things by the carload. At first she just lies there like a wet rag, which has no interest in this or any other life but after a while she perks up and when at last I start springing a few funny ones and I get a smile out of her, why I feel better than a million berries.

Maybe you think I'm not planning a lot of little games for Thomas that would make the tricks of the Spanish Inquisition a game of ping-pong by contrast. Yes, sir, when I finally leave that sweet little kid, I'm feeling plenty unfriendly towards the son of a whosis that caused all this. Just as I get up to go I say casually:

"By the way, of course, it's necessary for me to talk with Mr. Navarre and make absolutely sure that he never attempts to see you again or to mention anything he knows about this little trouble. He's out of town at present but if you could recall the names of a couple of his friends they could undoubtedly tell me where he is."

A little frown comes across her face at the mention of Navarre's name but she says:

"I believe he knew a Mr. Levy and a Mr. Donaldson quite well."

"Dopey" Levy and "Gat" Donaldson. My, yes! I knew those babies quite well myself.

"Oh, yes," I says, "I've heard of them, so that will be fine and I'll have all that fixed up in no time. Now you'll have nothing to worry about and nothing to do but get well."

"Yes, Mr. Smith," she said, that being the name I had given her, "I feel so much better than before you came. Somehow everything seems different. I hope you'll come again."

"I certainly will do that little thing," I replied. "I expect to be out of town for a while but I'll be sure to drop in when I return. And now I'll be on my way."

As I reached the door, she called out:

"Oh, Mr. Smith, I wonder if you would ask my father to come and see me?"

There's a smile on her pale little lips and

I started to say she could bet her hat I would but instead I said:

"I surely will. He's been very anxious to come but was afraid you didn't want to see him just yet."

And with that I left and shot down to the old boy's place on Wall Street. When I told him all about my talk and how I'd left her with a smile on her lips and asking for him, why that great big gray-haired stiff, who had more millions than I had thousands, just broke down and cried. It's a terrible thing to see a big, strong man break and I felt damn out of place.

Finally he snaps out of it and says:

"I'm going to write you a check for ten thousand right now and double that later on."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," I says. "When I finish my job, you'll pay me the twenty-five hundred berries we agreed on. And now I'm going after that bird and you're going to your girl. And listen, you keep a smile on your face all the time you're with her or I'll make you wish you had."

"All right, my boy," he says, "and good luck."

"I was born lucky, but listen to this. This bird's a damn good boy with a gun and I may not come back. But there's one thing you can depend on. No man alive is good enough to get me without getting a harp himself and if I don't come back, you can be sure he never will either. So consider the job all done and go up to that sanitarium with a free mind—and don't forget to smile."

With that parting crack, I'm on my way to headquarters, where I got a good friend in none other than Fogarty himself. I told the little girl that Levy and Donaldson "could" tell me where Thomas is doing his hideout but that don't indicate, by a long shot that they "will." It's going to take a little fancy work to worm that out of them, but I've already figured out how to handle that angle. So I waltz down to the big house and pop in on Fogarty.

"Hello, Chief," I says. "How's crime?"

"Hello yourself," he replies. "It's nothing to brag about."

We talk of this and that for a while and then I says:

"Chief, I came down to tell you a little story."

"You're a liar," he says, "you came down to get some help. But seeing as its you, why the story ought to be interesting and if it is, you'll probably get what you want. You usually do."

"Thanks for the kind words," I replies and proceeds to tell him all about the little game our friend Thomas has pulled. Of course, I don't mention any important names. I never do, and you'll notice I'm leaving them out of this little history.

Fogarty hears me through and then he says:

"The dirty, low-down whatsisonof!"

"Exactly," I replies.

"What can I do in a good cause?" he asks.

"Just this. You wouldn't have to think hard for a reason to pull in Dopey and the Gat, would you?"

"I guess not."

"Well if you yank those babies and toss them in the sweat box, then hint that if you knew where Thomas is hanging his hat, why you'd call it a day, I guess it would save me a lot of time, wouldn't it?"

The chief agrees with me and after a little chat I go back to my brownstone front to await developments.

It didn't take long. At five o'clock Fogarty calls up and gives me the address of Thomas, and it's located in the quiet, sleepy little village of Chicago.

"And say," he adds, "I told them two worms that if Thomas got a wire advising him to take the air, why Santa Claus would bring them a nice ball and chain to play with."

"Thanks a lot, Chief, and if I get a break, I'll be able to hop the 5:30 rattler."

I GOT the breaks, and the next afternoon I'm talking to the landlady where Mr. Winton had his room. (Winton is the name Thomas had adopted.) Well, my luck ran out here because it seems Mr. Winton had left the town but no forwarding address just about twenty-four hours before my arrival. That's not so good, so I'm wandering along the boulevard seeking inspiration when I bump into Slim Jenkins that used to work in the same agency that I started in.

We passed the time of day and went into some very unblind pig for some auld lang syne. After a while and several drinks, Slim asks me if it ain't too personal, what is my racket in Chi, and I told him I was seeking an old acquaintance, Slick Thomas.

"Why he was here," says Slim, "but he blew yesterday with a jane he took off another guy. The other bird won't be wanting her for some time, however, on account he's in the hospital taking care of three of Thomas' bullets."

"How interesting," I says and meant it. "Did he leave a mail forwarding address?"

"Well, it's this way," says Slim. "This bird he nicked is suspected by the boys of being a stoolie and his friends are little if any. That's how Thomas got away with his play. And if the dicks pop out after Thomas, why the boys will know for sure that this bozo is a stoolie, which don't help the department."

"Ain't it the usual procedure for the cops out this way to kind of collect in shooting addicts?"

"You forget what city you're in," laughs Slim and then adds, "but here's some info. Another stoolie trails Thomas and the broad on general principles and hears him buy one-way tickets for Minneapolis. The dicks aren't going to use the info so you can and welcome."

We had a few more snifters and that night I'm on another rattler and I know I'm in a lucky streak and that friend Thomas is playing a losing game. When at last I land in the sister city, I start on a tough job. I've got to go to all the hotels and hunt for a recent Mr. & Mrs. when I don't know what names they are using. If Thomas had used his bean, he'd have signed Mr. and Mrs. Perrywinkle, Salt Lake City, or something, but at the sixth good hotel, I find on yesterday's register a Mr. and Mrs. Navarre, all of which was in a woman's writing. Later I found that she picked the hotel and registered while he went to send some telegrams. Well, I call the room on the phone and ask for Mr. Navarre.

"He's not here just now," says a dame's voice.

Then I says: "I'm a friend and can I see his wife?"

She says I can, so up I go. The girl isn't hard to look at and seems like she might have a heart if you could drill through the steel wall the dirty knocks of life had put around it. So after looking in the bathroom, the closet and under the bed, I sit down so I'm facing the door and opposite her, and I get on my very best heart to heart confidential manners then.

"Sister, please listen till I get all through," I says. "I just got in from Chi and I know all about your little shooting difficulty in that wild and windy city and what you do is your business, but what your boy friend does is my business. And I'll tell you why. I was born and dragged up in the New York gutters and I'm doing pretty well. It so happens, however, that by sheer chance I met a little girl what's so innocent and sweet and so high above a low-down stiff like me that I don't even make a play for her although she's got me hook, line and sinker. I don't even annoy her with my presence, but I'm on the outskirts all the time trying to see that she gets a better break with life than—well you and me got for instance."

And then I go on to tell her how this blackmailing, dope-selling killer did his stuff. I lay it on heavy about the girl being a straight shooting, uneffected, inexperienced kid that only has a father to guide her and if I said Thomas worked a lot of dirty stuff that he really didn't, why what he did justified me. I talked that dame deaf, dumb and blind and when at last I see she's flopped, I ask her:

"Sister, how about giving the little girl a hand?"

For a couple of seconds she sits there thinking and I'm afraid maybe I lost out, when she goes over to a suitcase, picks out a piece of paper and hands it to me. On it is written Frank Thomas and the name of a hotel in Winnipeg, Canada.

"Now beat it, you," she says, "before I change my mind."

"O. K. sister," I replies, but on my way out, "How come Thomas blew this city so sudden and why did he leave his address?"

"He's superstitious," she tells me, "and was playing a hunch. I was to wire him if anyone inquired for him."

"Which you won't?"

"I will if you don't stop bothering me."

"By-by then," I says, "and it's a long walk back to Chi so slip this in your stocking."

It's a century I'm holding out to her.

"Get the hell out of here," she yells, "before I bust out crying!"

Well, I left and didn't feel bad about her not taking the dough, as Thomas must have left her plenty in payment for the info she was supposed to send about callers.

THAT night the 8:30 for Winnipeg found me swapping jokes in the smoker with a couple of traveling salesmen. When we pulled in at midnight, I headed right for his hotel as I'd had enough trouble trying to line my gun sites on Thomas. The clerk was very nice about looking up his room number when I explained I was a friend just in on the train from Minny. He was very nice but also very sorry to say the records indicated that Mr. Thomas had left early the morning before.

Maybe you believe that hit me as a good joke but if you do, you'll believe anything. There was only one thing to do, however, and I did it. I got a nice room, had a hot bath and a good sleep. The next morning after breakfast I hunted up the captain of the bellhops. To him I explained the circumstances together with a ten spot.

"Sure I know where he went," he says. "He's on his way up to Rice Lake. There's a sort of gold rush up around there."

"And how do I get there today?" I asks.

"You don't," he says, "there's only one train goes that way and it left an hour ago."

"O. K. When does the next one go?"

"Seven-thirty tomorrow morning. Laugh that off."

"People up there get lots of service," I snap. "Can't I get there in an auto?"

"You might," he says. And gives me the name of an auto hire agency.

To make a long, tough ride a short story, I pulled into a little Icelandic village called Riverton that night. On the way up the the driver told me I had to cut across Lake Winnipeg, and a guy by the name of Olafson had the only boat that could take me over. I found this guy's house and after banging on the door a while it opens quick and a fella about seven feet tall and four feet wide fills up the doorway.

"What the hell do you want?" he bellows.

"Say, is everybody in this section of the map as big as you," I asks in admiration, for I'm no shrimp but this bloke makes me look like a baby.

"Who the hell wants to know?" he comes back.

This kind of gets me sore but maybe I got some favors done so I snaps, "I do. I came to talk business and I got a quart of the Haig boys best grade Scotch in my overcoat pocket to help the conversation along a little."

He kind of grins all over his map at that an' says:

"A quart? Fine. But what are you going to drink?"

Say, I thought he was kidding about murdering that bottle himself but what he did to it was enough. As one A. M. turned into five, I found out this guy is a hell of an A-Number One gent. When five o'clock strikes, he says:

"Well, the trip's worth fifty bucks an' if that's jake, why let's have breakfast an' be on our way."

"Say listen," I chirps, "I don't mind being burned a little but I can't see a fifty dollar blister just to take a ride on a little lake."

"Little?" he yells. "Hey fella, this lake is five hundred miles long."

With that I shut up and we're soon on our way. After about three hours we're out of sight of land and believe me I learned about lakes from that trip. I also learned that a fella had gone in two days before and all the way over he had been practicing pot spots with a .45 automatic he wore in a leg holster. Olafson tells me about him merely because Thomas is the best pistol shot he ever saw and it's an interesting incident.

Right then I got a rush of brains to the head. In New York I could have bumped Thomas off and if I was caught, which would be very doubtful, I'd get out of it easy. But the Northwestern Mounties don't know him or me from Adam and that isn't so good, as I'm sure going to get caught up in this isolated country. So I starts working out a brilliant idea and says:

"Well, I'm up here entirely for my health. A friend of mine in New York suggested this would be an interesting trip for me to take."

"Oh," says Olafson, "maybe you know this pistol expert. He's from New York on a health trip also."

"Maybe," I replies unconcernedly. "What is his handle?"

"Frank Thomas."

"Thomas," I yells, jumping up and almost falling overboard.

"Hey sit down," yells Olafson. "What the hell's the matter with you? Want to upset this boat?"

I SAT down and tried to look weak in the gills and scared to death. For a while I sit there rubbing my head and acting nervous. Then I pull out the remains of the quart and take a big swig. All the while Olafson is looking at me like I'm crazy. The liquor seems to give me courage and I confess my story.

"Olafson," I says, "about a week ago I was up in a cabaret with a jane and this guy Thomas got fresh with her. I didn't know him from Adam and I beat him up and knocked him out. We both went to jail in the buzz wagon but I got out because I was in the right and Thomas got out because he had some pull. Just as we were leaving the courtroom Thomas steps up and whispers to me that in a month I'll be pushing up daisies. I didn't think anything about it until a man named Fogarty, who is police captain, tells me as a joke that the guy I beat up is the worst killer in New York, but they can't pin anything on him. That information didn't make me sleep any too well, so the next day I went to a friend of mine, who is a private detective. He looks up this Thomas bird and suggests that the best trick for me to do is to take a *pasear* out of town for a while as Thomas has every intention of getting me and while the police would probably get him later, it wouldn't do me any good. So I heard about this mining country and here I am. I never dreamt Thomas would trail me and told a lot of my friends where I was heading. It's funny though that he didn't follow me in instead of coming first. I don't savvy that play at all."

"That's easy," says Olafson, "he'll claim now that you followed him and he killed you in self defense."

"I'll bet you're right," I agrees, "and I don't know what to do about it."

"Do you want to go back," asks Olafson, and I can see in his eye he wouldn't turn back from the devil himself. If I'd said yes he'd have tossed me overboard and let me swim back. Well, of course, that's playing right into my hands so suddenly bristling with vim, vigor and determination, I say:

"No. I'll go on and face him. That is if you'll come along to see that I get an even break. As it stands now, he's probably got some game cooked up where I wouldn't have a chance."

"You're damn right, I'll go along," says Olafson, tickled silly at getting in on some real excitement. In fact, he gets all steamed up and plans the thing better than I could myself:

"Now when we get across the lake, we have to leave the boat and go the rest of the way in canoes. Right at the mouth of the river there's an Indian reservation. I know the chief well and I'll have him send two men up ahead of us to get the lay of the land in the Rice Lake district. One will come back and meet us with the information and the other will trail Thomas to make sure he don't ambush us."

You can bet I O. K.'d that plan as ninety per cent better than any I could figure out so when we reach the river, Olafson springs the plot on the chief. That worthy gent not only agrees but says he'll go himself and take his ten best bucks along. I collect from Olafson that this isn't exactly an escort but rather it's because, while there's one or two killings a year up there, it's practically never that an audience can enjoy the fun.

Of course, all this is the berries for me, as while they aren't specially rooting for me, just the same as witnesses later they are bound to see things as they expect to see them, which means they expect Thomas to pull some fast ones.

We start off that afternoon and spend the night on the river bank about three-quarters of the way up there. At daybreak we're off and just before we arrive at the place where we start to hoof it, one of the bucks that went ahead meets us and reports that Thomas is only three miles inland at a place called Dickie's Cabin. It seems this is a sort of flop house for weary guys that's going way into the district. The buck also states that Thomas has spent all his time lying around and practicing with that young cannon of his. We all start right off and there's no noise or gabbing of any kind. In fact, one guy stubs his toe and says, "Ouch!" Olafson gives him a dirty look and hisses "Chatterbox." When we come to a point which they tell me is only one hundred feet from the cabin, I slip out my .38 officer's model Colt and put the barrel up the sleeve and the handle in the palm of my left hand. If you hold your hand right no one could tell you had the gun there and to jump into action, your left mitt just hands your right the smoke iron. It's the fastest draw in the world and specially when no one knows where you got it from. It seems like you just picked it out of the air. And you can bet your last plaster no one saw me fix my arsenal.

We come into the opening and there's Thomas standing sidewise to us on the road. He's looking at something up in a tree and don't notice us till we're quite close. Just then the crowd does a fadeaway onto the sides of the road and I'm only twenty feet from him. I gives Olafson and the chief a do or die look, like I'm working up nerve and in a loud voice all can hear I say:

"Well, at last I'm here, Thomas. What are you going to do?"

Now to the crowd that means, "You've been waiting here to kill me and here I am. We're both out in the open and it's fair and square. What are you going to do?"

But to Thomas it means, "I'm a private dick hired by the girl's father and he wants you killed. You recognize me and by my rep I'm a gunman. What are you going to do?"

THOMAS don't wait but just a split second to see I have no gun in my mitt and then he snakes for his automatic. He has just got his hand on it when he sees a gun jump out of the air and into my hand. He knows he's beat by at least five bullets and quick as a wink he shoots his empty hands up over his head.

Oh, what a quick thinker he grew up to be! Yes, sir, he was bit by a fox in his youth, that baby was.

You see, I haven't got my cannon aimed in his direction when he shoots up his hands so if I drill him this gang will say I shot a man who had surrendered and was helpless. I'm sure thinking three hundred miles a second right then as this places me in a hole. You see, I figured to end Thomas before he could ever throw any wrenches into my nice little story. I got to fix that so I says:

"Thomas, you figured to get me in the back and when I beat you on the draw, you surrendered, knowing that I'm not a yellow murderer like you and wouldn't shoot. But I know if we don't settle this now that next time you will get me in the back. So I'm going to give you an even break with me and we'll fight to a finish. I will, that is, on one condition, which is that you keep your trap shut so I don't have to listen to a lot of nasty abuse which your dirty looking mouth would spill if it got the chance. Do you play my way or do I plug you now?"

Thomas nods his head yes.

"Olafson," I yell out, "take his gun and make sure it's all he's got."

It was the only gun, but in a case fastened at the back of his neck and under his coat collar is a seven inch knife.

"Nice peaceful baby you are," I remarks sarcastically, and I see the others are properly impressed. "Now, march down to the cabin and keep your hands up as I wouldn't trust you any further than I could throw a locomotive."

In the cabin I see a long, rough wood table and it inspires me with a final setting.

"Olafson," I says, "you can see the kind of a bird this guy is and if we don't finish this scrap now, why it's a cinch I never get an even break again. Am I right?"

"I'll say you are," he replies, looking at Thomas, whose eyes are spitting sparks and cold hate.

"Well then," I says, "suppose he gets at one end of this room and I at the other end and you put a gun at each end of this table. You guys can watch from the window in the far side and the door on this side and see that it's all fair and square."

"That's a damn good idea," Olafson agrees and the chief thinks the same.

"O. K.," I says. "Now Thomas, which end do you want?"

He nods to the north end of the cabin.

"Get going there," I says, following him to the place and then when we're away from the door I whisper: "You're going to die, you dirty bum."

He just sneers at this and I add:

"Funny, ain't it? But laugh this off, you pig; *I love that girl.*"

Boy, that got him cold, for now he knows it ain't just a professional job and that even if he gets me I'm going to live long enough to cash him for keeps. His map turns a pasty white.

I back away to my end of the room and hand Olafson my gun. The table is right in the center and he puts mine on one end and pointing towards Thomas and at the other end lays the automatic facing me. The chief is looking in the window with four bucks peeking over his shoulders and Olafson squats in the doorway with the rest of the bucks and the guy that owns the cabin looking over his head. It's so damn quiet you can hear the birds chirping out in the woods and the buzz of a fly which is batting around the ceiling. Thomas is opening and shutting his hands and biting his lips. His face is just a white smear against the logs and his breath kind of whistles as it comes out of his lungs. Me, I feel like I'm all steel springs and dynamite. The picture of the poor little girl comes to my mind and my lips curl back in a wolf snarl. My eyelids are closed to slits and the pupils are pin points of cold steel.

"Ready," says Olafson and his voice wavers a little.

"Set!"

"Go!"

I leap for the table and sling out two shots before my fingers is hardly on the gun. A bullet burns my cheek as the table goes over and I hit the floor. I rip two shots through the table top and like a flash roll about six feet away. As I swing the gat towards Thomas I see he's lying on the floor, flat, drawing a bead on me. Like a cat I go straight up in the air as a .45 nearly tears my leg off. I'm seeing stars but just before I pass out the eyes of Thomas come to my sight and let my last two bullets fly at them.

IT'S a day later that I come to and find a good chunk of my leg gone and a deep gulch along my jaw. Olafson gives me a big smile and calls in the chief, who shakes my hand, as do each of his bucks who trail in after him.

When they are gone, I asks Olafson:

"How about Thomas?"

"Oh boy!" he says. "One in the stomach, one in the lung and two over the eyes."

"Only four hits out of six," I says. "I guess I'm slipping. But still we had a lot of fun."

Olafson grins from ear to ear and replies:

"You're damn right, fella, you're damn right."

Well, they carried and canoed me back to the reservation and then at my request Olafson and the chief propelled me into Winnipeg, where, after retaining a mouthpiece, I kick in to the police. They work pretty speedy up there and two weeks later I hobble from the hospital to the court. I hear Olafson and the chief tell what a mean-looking rat Thomas looked like, how he wore a tied-down leg holster and practiced shooting all day. They don't forget he went for his gun as soon as I spoke to him and also mention all about the knife in the collar of his coat. They tell how the fight was absolutely square when if I'd been like Thomas, I'd have shot him when I had him cold. Oh, yes, and then my mouthpiece has a telegram read that the police got from New York. And it has all the works in it, believe me.

Fogarty knew what it was all about, of course, and what he said about Thomas almost scorched the paper. According to him, any guy that knifed Thomas in the back while he was sleeping would be entitled to a *croix de guerre*.

Well, they give me a clean bill of health and there's hand-shaking all around. I say by-by to the bunch, hobble down to a florist and tell him to wire——

No, never mind what I tell him, as that's another story.

Everybody's Meeting PLACE

Where writers, readers and the editor gather for informal discussion

SOME time ago I found in the day's news an item which held boundless possibilities. Not for us, unfortunately, but for the lucky youth of modern Italy. It was one of those strokes of government possible only in a dictatorship. Whatever you think of Mussolini, you will grant that this is an example of the man's genius.

The news item reported an edict by Mussolini, addressed to all masters of ships under Italian registry. They are to accept for free passage any accredited Italian youth who presents himself, to the number of two for each ship. These youths are to be students mostly; idlers are barred. They are to be permitted to board ship at any port in the world, and to leave it at any other port en route it might be their fancy to visit. They are to respect a captain's hospitality, but are under no other obligations. So long as they represent their country with credit to the world, they are free to rove over its four corners. And it is the aim of Mussolini that these young men, the most intelligent and alert of the new Italy, shall return home with a breadth of vision and understanding that no amount of lecturing in scholastic halls could give them. It is an enterprise of untold value to an awakening nation.

It is not so many years ago since I would have felt keen envy at this good fortune of young Italy. My own dreams of travel were ambitious—too ambitious for a youngster just getting a start in the world. Today I feel a simple regret that no such chance is afforded American youth.

Life has a way of teaching each one of us that the other side of romance is hard work and sometimes pain. But there is always one glorious interval when anything that opens new worlds to us is worth the price. Of a million eager Yankee youngsters swarming the globe, some would suffer, inevitably some would be hurt, but in thousands they would return home, healthy, broadened and sure of themselves with the manner of assurance that is manhood.

Mussolini has started something.

A MYSTERY OF THE WILDS

LAST February I spoke here of the voice of the harbor which lies outside the window of my office. The reader whose letter appears below reports certain other voices to be heard in the wastelands. I confess I am equally mystified regarding the source of his "music." Have any of you met a similar experience, and have you found an explanation for the phenomenon?

I am in the deserts and mountains of Arizona most of the time. I go in to town once each month for mail and provisions. I meet many things as I ramble around, many strange things, things that are beyond my ability to comprehend. One in particular was in my mind as I read your printed thought in the back of EVERYBODY'S. Far in the Superstition Mountains of Arizona, in the deepest, most rugged cañon, there are three caves halfway up a great yellow bluff. In these caves are mud dwellings. They are not the cliff-dwelling as found in other parts of Arizona.

The mud walls of these dwellings were made by people with very small hands. The hand prints of these ancient masons remain as though they were made yesterday. Just below these caves a beautiful pool of crystal clear water lies between green grassy banks. Tall ghostlike sycamores grow there in great numbers.

I have camped many times beneath those sycamores. It is a beautiful spot. Such a difference between there and the hot desert that lies fifteen miles to the south! As one lies there, just at twilight, begins the most wonderful music one could imagine. I have never heard music that could compare with it, vague, elusive at times; then again of greater volume. It is my opinion that no living being could record it.

The music is, I believe, beyond description. It seems to take you out of your mortal self and transport you back ages and ages, almost to the beginning of things. For the time being one feels as though he were in another world.

I have often tried to solve this little private mystery. I can't explain it. I can't even describe it intelligently.

You will probably say as you read this that it is the wind among the pinnacles, caves, trees, etc. that makes this wonder phenomenon. It cannot be, for usually there is no breeze in the mountains at twilight. It is as still as the tomb except for that music. Besides when the breeze is blowing at any other hour of the day there is no sound.

Why can't we have more from Ernest Douglas? He knows his Arizona and Mexico. He also knows that the Arizonans laid away their artillery about the time they killed the Earp Brothers at Tombstone.

Ray C. Howland,
Mesa, Arizona.

By a happy coincidence ERNEST DOUGLAS has his first story for some time in this issue. You will like *The Desert Bell,* as we all did here in the shop.

THE TOUGHEST BORDER TOWN

LAST month in these pages RAOUL F. WHITFIELD described his recent visit to Tia Juana, and said he believed it to be about as tough a town as ever throve along the Mexican border. His story in this issue, *Rio Red,* is set in that country, which he knows so well. Here is a word further from him on the subject.

Shall be glad, of course, to have you use any part of the letter regarding Tia Juana that you wish to use. However, I stress the fact that she was Tia Juana simply as I saw her one evening. The fact that there were no lights and that it was a holiday probably had much to do with effect produced—the lack of lights, particularly.

However, any town situated as is Tia Juana—and I don't mean the race track, which is, of course, quite apart from the town—can hardly fail to be a bit tough.

A director friend of mine got a good laugh when I told him about my experience. He seemed to think that the place was pretty tame. So there you are. Wide-open gambling, wide-open drinking, and no control of dance-hall ladies does not make for tameness, in my opinion. And when I say Tia Juana seems a tough town I do not compare it with American towns, but with such border towns as Juarez, Agua Prieta and Mexicali. Another thing—Tia Juana isn't advertised so much. It's Tijuana, the race track, that is advertised. There are bars, places to eat, etc., in the track grounds. Only about ten per cent of the people who go to the track get into Tia Juana, which is a half mile or so distant on a different road. I've talked with several people who consider the track the town.

In any case, I'm going to do a tale of Tia Juana as *I* saw her. For a year and a half, some years ago, I was a fair reporter on the *Pittsburg Post.* You can't fool my eyes.

Whitfield.

BUZZARDS

SOMEHOW, most of my correspondence this month seems to be concerned with the desert country. You remember, of course, ARED WHITE's *Buzzards,* which appeared in the March magazine. One reader, R. L. Larson, takes a slight exception to the story. Unfortunately there is no time to get a reply from Ared White now, but I'll wager that he can point out on the map the exact stretch of country where the events occurred.

Here is what Larson writes:

I am just a new reader of EVERYBODY'S (though I have a hazy recollection of reading a thrilling account of polar exploration in it eighteen or nineteen years ago), but in view of the invitation extended in the *Meeting Place* of the March issue, I take pleasure in writing to let you know I thoroughly enjoyed Ared White's *Buzzards,* and R. E. Hamilton's *The Lights of Little Grizzly.*

However, being fairly well acquainted with the deserts of the Southwest, particularly those of California, Arizona and the lower half of Nevada, and though Tooele, Utah, is beyond the limits of my general desert travel, I cannot reconcile myself to a stretch of one hundred and fifty miles without a drop of water to be found anywhere along the way.

I do not mean this as criticism, but my personal experience has never convinced me that even one hundred miles will prove waterless in the Southwest (I speak of the real Southwest—the Pacific Southwest—not the Texas Southwest, which is all south and no west) providing the prospector or traveler will digress two or three miles at some likely point. I have, however, counted on springs that, due to a succession of dry years, had ceased their flow and even digging would produce no results, thus considerably curtailing my use of water until the next supply could be reached.

The buzzard, of course, is the accepted scavenger, but nevertheless, when a friend and myself were bogged down in a salt marsh in Death Valley six years ago, the beady stare of two black crows was not particularly amusing to me, reminding me of Poe's *The Raven.* When my companion and I showed signs of vigorous life, the patiently waiting crows flew disgustedly away, one of them emitting a raucous "*caw, caw, caw, caw!*"

R. L. Larson,
Los Angeles, California

SHOP TALK

IN THE line-up this month are several new faces. HULBERT FOOTNER'S work you probably have seen before. He has written many excellent stories, and his latest novel, *The Queen Of Clubs*, was published only recently. In *North Of Nowhere* he writes of his own country and his own people. Most of the events in that story, he told me recently, actually occurred at an isolated trading post in Northern Canada, where he was an absorbed spectator . . . PARKER KERBY will be a new acquaintance. I have remarked elsewhere what I think of *Guns Across The Table*, and I take exceeding pride in introducing him. He is a young man at present engaged in confidential investigation work in New York, an occupation which brings him in contact with every strata of the great city's teeming life . . . Of the other stories, little need be said. With Dingle, White, Carey, Shaw and Douglas on the contents page, an editor may sit back contentedly and let them speak for themselves. Which, those stories certainly can . . . HUGH PENDEXTER returns next month with a long novelette. It is another tale of the glamorous gold days in the Old West . . . R. W. ALEXANDER, who published his first novel at the age of twenty-one, spins a most thrilling yarn of the South Seas as a companion novelette . . . And THOMSON BURTIS, who hasn't been around these parts in some time, offers a serial of the circus lot which is a corking story of mystery and swift action.

THE QUESTION OF SERIALS

THERE have been many letters commenting on our announced program of running only one serial in long instalments. The majority have approved of that course. Some have urged me to abandon all serials. One of that faction recently spoke up in this *Meeting Place;* and now here, in turn, is the opinion of a dissenting reader:

> Sorry to learn that you are only running one serial in EVERYBODY'S in the future. Your serials have, in my estimation, been the life of the magazine.
>
> Although I agree that it is hard to wait for the next instalment of a good story, still if it is a good story, the longer it is, the better.
>
> *Howard Kennedy,*
> Stockton, N. J.

This is a question never to be settled to the satisfaction of everybody. But a compromise is possible. Simply this—that any really good story coming this way is to be impounded at all cost, whether it be five or fifty thousand words in length. The manner of publishing is incidental.

HEROES OF THE SEA

THE story is almost forgotten now. It had its day and retired before the newest sensation. But when it was fresh and in the headlines of every paper in the land we were all thrilled. No author skilled in suspense could approach the drama of it. No reader could fail to be moved by its poignancy. It was a tale of unsurpassed heroism.

You recall it, of course. The New York to Boston steamer *Robert E. Lee* put out into the stormy Atlantic the night of March 9th. A blizzard was raging and the seas ran high. Something went wrong and the steamer piled up on Mary Ann Rocks off Manomet Point in the blinding storm. Even before an S. O. S. from the stricken ship had silenced the broadcasting stations, the Coast Guardsmen from Manomet were on the job. Time and time again they made heartbreaking attempts to launch their power dory. Finally they succeeded.

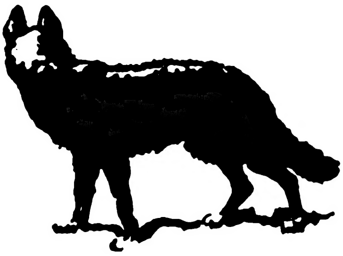
They reached the stranded vessel, and remained with her until every passenger and member of the crew was safe aboard other craft standing by. Then, exhausted from the storm and cold, they put off for shore. Their dory was swamped by a wave more powerful than they. Half drowned, they helped each other cling to the bottom of their tiny boat. And there, in sight of land and of the broken ship they had aided, three valiant men died before others could give them aid in their own hour of tragic peril.

When you read *The Light on Little Hope* in this issue, the memory of those three heroic Coast Guardsmen may glow more brightly for a moment. And you may begin to understand a manner of valor which only those who go down to the sea in ships can ever completely know.

WILLIAM CORCORAN.

The News of Next Month

Tales of Frontiers Near and Far



The Circus Flyers

A new serial

By Thomson Burtis

Beginning a thrilling novel of action and mystery in the outlandish world of the big tops.

Uneasy Gold

By Hugh Pendexter

A long novelette of the old Western gold trails, the hills, the camps, and the hard men who ruled them

The Pirates of Pindoro

A novelette of the South Seas

By R. W. Alexander

And eight exceedingly good short stories, including "The Enemies" by Henry LaCossitt, who writes of the Caribbean, "The Gypsy Gyp", a Western yarn by Anthony M. Rud, "The Grudge Fight" by Walter W. Liggett, who fought in the ring himself, and a tale of the hobo jungles, "Bindle Stiff" by William Donald Bray. And in addition, "The Secret Lagoon" reaches its smashing conclusion.